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# THE GRAND ÉCART

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# THE GRAND ÉCART



# THE GRAND ÉCART

## I

JACQUES FORESTIER was easily moved to tears. Sentimental music, the cinema, a serial novel, sufficed to make him weep. He did not mistake these false witnesses of emotion for real tears, which seem to flow without reason. Since he hid his sentimentality in the shadow of a theater-box, or alone with a book, and since genuine grief is rare, people thought him callous and witty.

Witty, because he had a quick mind. He summoned rhymes from one end of the world to the other, joining them in such fashion that they appeared to have rhymed since the beginning of time. By rhymes I mean—anything at all. Rudely, he jostled names, faces, actions, hesitant remarks, stretching them as far as they would go. For this mannerism he

was known as a liar. Add that he admired beautiful bodies and lovely faces without distinction of sex. This last singularity won him a reputation for moral degeneracy; for an evil reputation is the only gift that people bestow without thinking.

His appearance was not to his liking, and since he did not resemble the ideal young man of his fancy, Jacques no longer tried to attain to a type from which he felt himself too far removed. He elaborated weaknesses, eccentricities, and absurdities until they ceased to make him uncomfortable. He paraded them without embarrassment.

By dint of cultivating a barren soil, of tending and beautifying wretched weeds, he had taken on a hard surface difficult to reconcile with his gentleness. And so, naturally thin, he made himself scrawny; nervous, he became fidgety; unable to tame a shock of yellow hair which stuck out in every direction, he let it grow wild.

In point of fact this appearance, as anti-artificial as possible, brought him all the advantages of artificiality, masking a middle-

class taste for order and an exaggerated disinterestedness inherited from his father, and a melancholy temperament he owed to his mother.

When one of the clever, ferocious Parisian hunters ran Jacques to earth it was easy to wring his neck. He was demoralized by a word.

Out of contempt for that elementary superiority which consists in taking the precise opposite of every stand adopted by one's class, Jacques accepted its point of view, but in a manner so different that his own kind could not recognize him as one of themselves.

His was, in a word, the most dubious kind of distinction—animal distinction. This aristocrat, this son of the common people, who could endure neither the aristocracy nor the masses, deserved to be imprisoned and guillotined ten times a day. He could not get along with the Right, nor any better with a Left which seemed to him flabby. But his excessive nature perceived no acceptable middle ground. Bearing in mind the axiom: *extremes meet*, he

dreamed of a virginal extreme-right that would melt into the extreme-left at a point where he might act alone. Such a seat does not exist, or, if it exists, no one sits in it. Jacques sat in it as of right, and from it he looked at politics, art, and morality.

He lobbied for no recompense. People grudge one such an attitude: those who lobby, because disinterestedness attracts a certain luck which they refuse to acknowledge as coming without intrigue; and those who recompense, because they are not solicited.

Get there. Jacques wondered where one gets to. Did Napoleon get to the Coronation or to Saint Helena? Does a train get there that is talked about because it ran off the track and killed its passengers? Does it get there any better if it runs into the station?

Looking more carefully at his silhouette, I denounce Jacques as a parasite on earth. Where, after all, is the permit authorizing him to enjoy food, a lovely evening, a daughter of man? Let him show it. Society rises up like a policeman and asks to see it. He grows worried. He stammers. He cannot find it.

This sensualist whose feet are firmly planted on the ground, this critic of nature and of art, holds to the world by a thread.

He is as heavy as a diver.

Jacques pegs away at the bottom. He feels his way. He forms habits there. Nobody brings him up to the surface. He has been *forgotten*. To come up, to take off helmet and suit, is the passage from life to death. But through the tube there blows a ghostly breath which gives him life and overwhelms him with nostalgia.

Jacques lives at grips with a long fainting spell. He feels unsteady. He never creates, except in play. He scarcely dares sit down. He is one of those sailors who are never cured of seasickness.

Finally, strictly physical beauty posts up an air of being everywhere at home. Jacques, in exile, covets it. The less kindly it is, the more it moves him; it being his destiny to be forever wounded by it.

He sees a dance through a window: a race of

people whose passports are in order, happy to be alive, living in their true element and doing without diving-suits.

And so these unamiable faces become the center of Jacques' dreams.

This is what the writing of Jacques Foresier, who is now looking at himself in a wardrobe-mirror, would betray to an ideal handwriting expert.

Make no mistake. We have just painted Jacques full face, but even here his character is still visible in profile only. That is why we speak of an ideal expert. In unravelling the pen-strokes, he would have to unravel the entire line of a life. Jacques becomes the man who has just been described because, in part, of what follows; and what follows happens to him in part because of what has just been described.

Things, atoms, take their rôles seriously.

If this mirror were absent-minded, doubtless Jacques might be able to put first one leg and then the other into it, and see himself thus from a vital angle so new that it is impossible for us to imagine it. No. The mirror plays safe. The mirror is a mirror. The wardrobe a wardrobe. The room a room, on the second floor, in the rue de l'Estrapade.

He is still thinking of that Englishman who committed suicide after having written: "Too many buttons to button and unbutton: I'm through." For Jacques was unbuttoning his jacket.

Wait. Wait for what? Jacques would have liked to wait for something clear, to simplify his waiting. He had no religious faith, or his faith was so vague that his mother, considering him an atheist, prayed for him.

A vague belief makes a dilettante soul. Now, dilettantism is a crime against society. He believed too much. He did not limit his beliefs, and he did not define them. To limit one's beliefs induces a state of soul, just as to define and limit one's tastes in art induces a state of mind.

He looked at himself. He inflicted upon himself this spectacle.

We are filled with things which thrust us outside ourselves. From childhood, he had felt the desire to be of those whom he thought beautiful, and not to be loved by them. His own beauty displeased him. He found it ugly.

He had memories of human beauty which were so many wounds. One evening at Mürren, for example.

At the foot of the mountain you drink hastily a glass of cold beer which shatters your temples point-blank. The funicular rises between mulberry trees. Little by little, your ears are stopped, your nose is uncorked. You arrive.

Jacques was eleven years old. He sees again a priest who has lost his trunk, the doze, the hotel embalmed in resin, the dusty arrival in the drawing-room where ladies are playing patience, where gentlemen are smoking and reading newspapers. Suddenly, during the halt before the lift, the lift comes down, deposits a couple. A young man and a girl with dark faces, constellated eyes, laughing

and disclosing superb teeth. The girl wears a white dress with a blue sash. The young man is wearing a dinner jacket. There are sounds of dishes, and the smell of the kitchen infests the halls.

Once in his room, which opens on to a wall of ice, Jacques looks at himself. He compares himself with the couple. He longs for death.

Later, he became acquainted with these young people. Tigrane d'Ybréo, the son of an Armenian from Cairo, collected postage stamps and cooked sickening sweets over an alcohol lamp. His sister Idgi wore new dresses and down-at-the-heel slippers. They used to dance together.

The worn slippers and the honey-cakes bore witness to a royal but sordid line. Jacques dreamed of this pastry and of these heels. He envied them. He saw in them the only way to become like these two sacred cats. He wanted to collect stamps, to make almond caramels. He wore down his tennis shoes artificially.

Idgi coughed. She was tubercular. Tigrane broke his leg skating. Their father re-

ceived telegrams. One morning they left, coughing, limping, followed by a dog as mysterious as Anubis.

Jacques coughed. His mother became wild with anxiety. He left her to her torment. He was coughing for love. On the road, he limped when no one was looking.

Every evening after dinner, seated in a rattan armchair, he seemed to see Idgi again with her Blessed Virgin dress in the lighted frame of the lift, between the hallboy and Tigrane, rising into heaven upborne by angels.

Between eleven and eighteen years, he consumed himself like Armenian paper which burns swiftly and does not smell agreeably.

Finally, the trips to Switzerland ceased. Madame Forestier took him from the Italian lakes to Venice.

On the shores of the Lago Maggiore, he met a graduate of the *Ecole Normale* who was studying Bergson and Taine. He had a blond moustache, a pair of eyeglasses, and the humor

of an imitation Barrès. His intelligence was sharpened to a point. He trimmed it down while savoring it, like an all-day sucker. This undisciplined disciple despised the Borromean Isles. He nicknamed them "the Shubert brothers."

His witticism represented for Jacques the first revelation of the free use to which the senses might be put. He had never suspected that these isles might be ridiculed.

Seen in the daylight, Venice is a sumptuous county-fair shooting gallery in crumbs. At night, it is a negress in love, dead in her bath with her paste jewels.

On the afternoon of arrival the hotel gondola is as amusing as a side-show. It is not a commonplace conveyance. But parents do not see it thus. Venice will begin tomorrow. Today, we do not take the gondola; we take the omnibus. We count the luggage. We do not look at the city, which resembles the wings of the *Opéra* during intermission.

The next morning, Jacques saw the crowd

of tourists. On Saint-Mark's Square, caught in the trap of the theatrical setting, this fashionable crowd parts with all its secrets as at a masked ball. Neither sex nor age is a bar to the frankest impudence. Here, finally, the most timid dare to assume the gesture or the costume which they desired so shamelessly in London or in Paris. It is a fact that the masked ball unmasks. It is like a draft board. Venice, with its footlights and its spotlights, strips all souls naked.

Jacques' torment of love took a more disappointing turn here than at Mürren. At night, under the mosquito netting, he heard the guitars, the tenors. He suspected conspiracies. He wept because he was not the city. Helio-gabalus in his wildest caprices was never more exacting.

The normal student from Baveno came through Venice. He presented Jacques to a journalist and a dancer. They often went out together. One night the journalist accompanied Jacques as far as his hotel.

"I live in a vile atmosphere in Paris," he said. "I'm in love with this girl, and she

doesn't know it. When I go back it will be impossible for me to take up my old habits again; yet, at the same time, I know it is going to be hard to break them."

"But suppose Berthe loves you." (Berthe was the dancer's name.)

"Oh! she isn't in love with me. You ought to know that. Anyway, I am going to kill myself in two hours."

Jacques rallied him about the classic suicide in Venice, and wished him good night.

The journalist committed suicide. The dancer was in love with Jacques. He had never suspected it, and he only learned it years afterward from a third person.

This episode disgusted him with the poetry of feverishness. He brought away from a walk in the Eaden Gardens an intermittent fever which continued to remind him disagreeably of his stay.

Madame Forestier was fearful of colds, bronchitis, and traffic accidents. She could not discern the dangers run by the psyche. She allowed Jacques to play with them.

Venice had disappointed Jacques like a stage setting revamped to serve again and again, for every actor puts it into at least one act of his life. In the museums, after two hours of walking and gazing, its splendor fell heavily astride his shoulders.

Dead of fatigue and cramp he left, went down the steps, looked at the Dario palace saluting the boxes across the way like an old *prima donna*, and returned to his hotel. He admired the endurance of the couples who "did" Venice with the activity of insects. Those who knew it by heart and had plunged their trumps a hundred times into the golden pollen of Saint-Mark's, were piloting their new loves. The rôle of cicerone rejuvenated them. Their only halt was made at some shop where the beloved object would buy glass jewellery, or volumes of Wilde or d'Annunzio.

Like ourselves, who come back to the subject of Venice, Jacques, aided by his little fever, grew irritated with this ravishing house of assignation to which the elect come to sate themselves.

Our very insistence proves how greatly he

was influenced by a charm which his shadow-half rejected.

**H**alf shadow, half light: such is the illumination of planets. One half the earth sleeps; the other half works. But from that half which dreams there emanates a mysterious power.

In man, it sometimes happens that the slumbering half contradicts the active half. Man's real nature speaks in it. If he profits from the lesson, if man listens to its counsel and puts his light-half in order, the shadow-half becomes dangerous. Its rôle then changes. It sends forth miasmas. We shall see Jacques at grips with this night of the human body. For the moment it protected him, sent him counter-poisons, files, rope-ladders.

All succor does not reach its destination. Paris is a craftier city than Venice in that it

hides its traps better and is not so naïvely put together. At Venice, one knows in advance, as of certain houses, that there is water, the hall of mirrors, the Veronese room, the Bridge of Sighs, faded beauties in pink chemises, and a danger of catching cold. But how can one know one's way about Paris?

Jacques, the Parisian, the privileged person, came to Paris as if from the provinces. He had left five months before, but he had crossed on his way the delicate equator of age where the mind and the body make their choice.

His mother thought she was bringing back the same person, slightly distracted by the Italian panorama. She brought back another from Italy. And it was precisely at Venice that this moulting had occurred. Jacques was aware only of restlessness. He put it down to the suicide and the transactions he had seen take place under the arcades. In reality, he left behind a dry skin floating on the Grand Canal; one of those skins which adders hang on dog-rose bushes, light as foam and open at the mouth and eyes.

## II

THE map of our life is folded in such a way that we never see one single great road across it, but always, as it gradually unfolds, a new little road. We think we are choosing, but we have no choice.

A Persian gardener said to his prince: "I met Death this morning. He threatened me. Save me. A miracle could take me to Ispahan this evening."

The kind prince loaned him his horses. In the afternoon, the prince met Death.

"Why," he asked him, "did you threaten my gardener this morning?"

"I did not threaten," answered Death. "It was a gesture of surprise. For I saw him far from Ispahan this morning, and I am to meet him at Ispahan this evening."

Jacques was studying for university entrance. His parents, forced by the loss of a model manager to spend a year in Touraine, placed him with a tutor, M. Berlin, in the rue de l'Estrapade.

M. Berlin rented two storeys. He lived on the first, and put his pupils on the second in five rooms on a sordid hallway, lighted by a gas lamp which a clot of dust prevented from opening all the way.

Jacques had a room between that of Mahieddine Bachtarzi, the son of a rich merchant of Saint-Eugene, the Back Bay of Algiers; and that of an albino named Pierre de Maricelles.

Opposite lived a very young pupil with an effeminate but charming face. He answered to the surname of Petitcopain. The year before, in Sologne, he and his little brother had wished to play a joke on their tutor. But at the moment when, disguised as ghosts, they were about to go into his room at midnight, his door opened and their mother came out in her nightdress, her hair in disorder. The door hid them. She crossed the hall, put an

ear against their father's door and came back to the tutor's room without seeing them.

Petitcopain was never to forget the moment in which they crept back into bed without exchanging a word.

The last room was the room of disorder. There, in a wreck of books, notebooks, ties, shirts, pipes, ink, tubs, sponges, fountainpens, handkerchiefs, and blankets, camped Peter Stopwell, champion broad-jumper.

Madame Berlin was much more fresh than her husband, who had been married before. She simpered and thought the pupils in love with her. Sometimes she would go into one of their rooms, and the hasty attempt to conceal something foreign to his work would leave the pupil embarrassed. She would look full into his blushing face and burst into laughter.

She recited Racine in places where it is more

decent to be silent. One day the pupils overheard her; realizing that they were listening, she transformed her recitation into a cough which conducted her progressively to silence.

A significant characteristic of Madame Berlin was the following. When they were first married, Berlin and she took in as boarder, in the country, a divorced pianist. Berlin came home every evening after school by the seven o'clock train. One evening he was obliged to stay in town. Madame Berlin, who was very timid, begged the pianist to sleep with her. With some reluctance, the pianist transported herself to the marital couch. Twice in the same week, Berlin slept out, and his wife renewed her request. The pianist would wish her companion good night, turn toward the wall, go to sleep, and, in the morning, return hastily to her own room.

Seven years later, in a group in which the conversation turned about this pianist, each person accusing her of questionable morals, Madame Berlin smiled mysteriously and declared that she "had every reason to believe" through "personal experience" that this young

woman was, more than anything else, "vain-glorious of vices she didn't possess."

When this naïve actress served lukewarm tea, for example, she hoped that she was cleverly turning away comment by pretending to burn her tongue. "Don't drink it!" she would cry. "Wait for it to cool. It is boiling!"

Berlin saw his wife, his pupils, and life through dull eyes behind spectacles. He wore a white beard, and house slippers. His trousers looked like those worn by the fellow who does the hind legs of the elephant at the circus. He taught at the Sorbonne, played cards at the café Voltaire, and came home to sleep. His pupils took advantage of this somnolence to recite whatever came into their heads, and to hurry through their lessons with the help of translations.

The servant finishes this picture. She was never the same. A new one appeared every fortnight, usually because the last one had cleaned a Boule clock which M. Berlin wound up himself and which he allowed no one else to touch.

Everybody came together at noon and at

eight in the evening around a table at which Madame Berlin dealt out tough meat. Her husband ate mechanically. From time to time he was shaken by a sombre hiccup which convulsed him like a mountain of snow.

Peter Stopwell would have had the beauty of a Greek if broad-jumping had not stretched him like a badly taken photograph. He had come over from Oxford. To it was due his fatuousness, his cigarette boxes, his navy blue muffler, and a multiform immorality hidden by his track suit. Petitcopain loved him. On Sundays he carried Stopwell's trunks and bathrobe out to the Parc des Princes.

To love and to be loved; that is the ideal. Provided always that it is the same person. The contrary often happens. Petitcopain was loved and was in love. Only, he was loved by a girl laboratory student, and he was in love with Stopwell. His love amazed him. He was the victim of those shadows in which the senses encounter the heart.

His love flattered Stopwell who did not let this be seen. He snubbed the poor little fellow. "It isn't done," he would say in reply to the slightest childish caress. Or else: "You're not clean, you know. You should wash. You should bathe. You should rub yourself down. You never bathe. People who don't bathe smell bad."

Often, Stopwell's reproaches were a kind of English teasing. But Petitcopain had not got beyond the A B C of tears and laughter. He did not understand. He believed himself dirty, indecent, and an idiot.

One evening when Petitcopain, seated on the edge of the bed where Stopwell lay smoking, put his hand reverently on the Englishman's shoulder, Stopwell shook him off and asked if he were a girl to be hanging around a man's neck. Petitcopain burst into tears.

"Oh," said Stopwell lighting a fresh cigarette from the butt which he threw carelessly away; "you are always begging, or crying, or stroking, or petting. You ought to go out with the girls. You can get one for fifty centimes back of the Panthéon."

Maricelles was the sixth son of a family of effete country squires. His constipation kept this albino interminably in a place which he rendered inaccessible. The rule in the Maricelles family was that patience alone must solve problems of this kind, the youngest brother having died of a rupture because he had tried to force destiny.

“You Frenchmen,” said Stopwell to Petitcopain; “you love dirt. Molière talks of nothing but purges.”

Petitcopain hung his head and dared not cross the threshold so ridiculed.

Mahieddine Bachtarzi was of Turkish origin and flew the fez. He had a red one, another of grey fur, and one of astrakhan. He was big, fat, puerile. His calling cards bore a curious title:

MAHIEDDINE BACHTARZI  
*Inspector*

He wrote verses; he inhaled ether. One day, when the odor of ether became too strong, Jacques went into his room and found him, fez on his head, seated on the ledge of the open window, with a drooling lip, stopping his left nostril with one finger while he held a druggist's phial to his other nostril. Without hearing Jacques, he swayed, deafened by the frozen grasshoppers of the drug.

Was this the ideal environment found by a delicate mother fearful of microbes and draughts?

Jacques had just taken his place in the Berlin household after several days of moodiness when a tragi-comic interlude interrupted its tranquillity. Petitcopain fell ill, and in a fashion which left no room for doubt about the origin of his malady.

M. Berlin heard his confession. He learned that the poor child had followed Stopwell's advice to the letter. Petitcopain sobbed.

"It's incredible!" Madame Berlin exclaimed. But the thing had to be hushed up.

Jacques went in to see him every day. One evening, in a feeble voice, Petitcopain begged him to ask Peter why he never came to his room.

Stopwell, in a cloud, was studying Auguste Comte.

“Why?” he replied; “because he disgusts me. Do you think I want to go to see a boy who sleeps with diseased women? I never sleep with anybody.”

“You are too hard on him,” Jacques murmured. “The poor kid; he asks little enough of you. . . .”

“Little enough! And supposing my regiment were to see me while he was messing with my hands. You must be out of your mind.”

This “supposing my regiment were to see me” was like the “supposing my mother were to see me” of a virgin.

Jacques got up to go when Peter, opening a box of cigarettes, caught him by the sleeve.

“What! Are you going back to that monkey? At Oxford, we treat them like servants. Leave him alone and stay with me.”

His fist gripped Jacques with herculean strength. He pulled him down upon a trunk.

Had his gesture been enough to let drop a mask? Thus blown roses lose their fresh cheeks when we knock against the vase. Jacques saw a hitherto unrevealed face, bare and devoid of all indifference.

He got up. "No, Stopwell," he said, "it's late. I have a letter to write."

"Just as you like, old chap."

Stopwell, with the smoothness of a crook, turned around and showed another face, a new mask held in place by a cigarette.

Summing up, Jacques was not liked by Petitcopain who envied him the false good graces of Stopwell. Stopwell detested him and hid it. Bachtarzi was resentful because he had come in while the Turk was sniffing ether. Maricelles despised them all in a lump.

There remained the Berlin couple.

Occasionally, a pertinent word from Jacques lit up the tutor's eye at table, and

Madame Berlin, charged by her husband with the duty of monitor, lingered longest in his room. She thought Stopwell was not "gallant." The Arab "frightened" her. The others were brats.

One Saturday evening, when all the pupils were out either at their homes or at the theatre, Jacques remained alone on his floor with a sore throat. Madame Berlin brought up some camomile to him, felt of his forehead, and took his pulse. Jacques soon saw that the *patronne* was playing Stopwell's game; but this time, instead of extinguishing the flame, his reserve aggravated it, and bit by bit Madame Berlin abandoned the rôle of second mother. Jacques pretended not to understand, and, coughing, complained in the way invalids do when they wish to rest. He saw through his half-shut eyes Madame Berlin, her mind deranged by desire while, to right and left in the candle-light, her shadow was distorted on the partitions of the room. Finally, with an astonishing grip, she drew his hand to her.

"Jacques! Jacques!" she murmured then: "what are you doing?"

A noise at the outer door saved him. Madame Berlin released her hold, adjusted herself, and fled.

Mahieddine was coming in from the theatre. Jacques heard him whistling the chorus of a popular song. He whistled off tune and recommenced the faulty air.

The next day, Jacques dared not look at Madame Berlin at table. She, on the contrary, braved him, reassured him, forgave.

Jacques lived in complete solitude and worked like a dullard. What did he know? Nothing. Unless that every gesture gets us into trouble with our kind. He wished that he had died of his sore throat, but he had almost ceased to cough.

Mahieddine proposed that they go to the Scala together. Box seats were cheap at Sunday and Thursday matinees. Jacques tried to be agreeable. He accepted. They inveigled Petitcopain whose family, living in

the industrial region in the North, provided him with a handsome allowance.

Thus, on the third Sunday, Jacques met Mahieddine's mistress, Louise Champagne.

Louise was better known than her dances, and better placed in the *demi-monde* than on the posters. She was one of those women who earn fifty francs in the theatre and fifty thousand at home. She told Jacques that he could not live alone, and that she would find him a friend: Germaine.

This popular girl played four parts in the Scala review which was dropping of fatigue after three hundred and fifty performances.

Germaine smiled high up between the orchestra leader and the drums. Her beauty hovered on ugliness, but as an acrobat hovers on death. It was her way of thrilling you.

This hybrid attracted Jacques. Alas, the species of freedom we enjoy allows us to commit faults which a plant or an animal would avoid. By the light of Louise's lamp, Jacques recognized his desire.

After a first meeting in her dressing-room, Louise agreed to arrange everything, and

asked Jacques to call on her the next day in the rue Montchanin.

The following day he skipped a class, left Mahieddine, and ran to the appointment.

He found Champagne discomfited. He was not to Germaine's taste. She thought he had charm, but he was not her type.

Louise was sad at having to communicate such bad news. "Poor little chap."

She stroked the nape of his neck, pinched his nose, and, in a word, proposed without beating about the bush to console him.

Peter, Madame Berlin: after all. But this refusal was more difficult. Louise Champagne was beautiful, and there was no escape from the divan. They deceived the Arab.

Bachtarzi suspected nothing and cursed Germaine, for she owned an automobile bigger than Louise's little car, and Mahieddine had already looked forward to life in a harem.

One Sunday Jacques was passing through the wings before the door of Germaine's dressing-room. She called to him, locked him

in, and asked why, after Louise's move and her favorable answer, he had turned Cossack and pushed courtesy to the point of employing Louise to deliver his reply.

Jacques was dumbfounded. Germaine saw that his stupor was not feigned, cajoled him, consoled him, and did not speak to Louise again.

On the pretext that to deceive Mahieddine was distasteful to him, Jacques followed his new conquest. Louise accused him to Mahieddine of having made love to her. She refused to see him.

The neighbors in the rue de l'Estrapade lived in mute hostility.

### III

**I**N Paris, art—and chiefly bad art—is a magical spot-transformer. It does not remove spots; it displays them. After the application, a bad reputation widely heralded becomes as advantageous as a good one. It demands the same attention. Many kept women make themselves immune with the aid of the stage. The theatre is the tax they pay. But it interferes with their industry.

After the theatre cure, Germaine and Louise took their vacation. They took long vacations. Art did not nurture them.

Germaine had a rich lover, so rich that his mere name signified wealth. He was called Nestor Osiris, like a box of cigarettes. His brother Lazare kept Loute, Germaine's younger sister.

Germaine was affectionate and would have sent Osiris to the devil, but her sister kept a

sharp lookout for squalls. She eyed Jacques with disfavor, despite the fact that, for her part, she was deceiving Lazare with a painter. She knew that her sister would bring no prudence into her affairs, and she feared the result.

She resembled Germaine as a plaster cast resembles its marble original. This is to say that they were alike, save in everything.

Despite the detestable atmosphere in which he was living since he had fallen in love, Jacques' heart remained intact and capable of ennobling anything.

Germaine drew her freshness from the dunghill. She threw on it with the greediness of a rose; and as the rose presents the spectacle of a deep mouth which draws its perfume from the dead, so her laughter, her lips, her cheeks, owed their brilliance to the panics on the Exchange.

If a landscape is indifferent to us, we can easily despise it. Venice offering itself, would Jacques have despised Venice?

The heart lives shut in. This is the explana-

tion of its sombre impulses and its deep despairs. Always ready to give of its wealth, it is at the mercy of its envelope. What does the poor blind thing know? It looks anxiously for the least sign which will draw it from its boredom. A thousand fibres signal to it. Is it a worthy object for which its aid is solicited? No matter. It wears itself out with confidence, and when the order comes to interrupt its service, it contracts in a mortal exhaustion.

Jacques' heart had received permission to move. It stirred with the awkwardness and the ardor of a beginner.

And so Jacques feared the first effects of this capsule which opens within us and releases a powerful drug.

As quickly as, on the screen, a woman scarcely visible in a crowd is followed by a close-up of the same woman's face six times as large as life, Germaine's face obscured the world, obstructed the future, masked for Jacques not only his examinations and his friends, but his mother, his father, his own personality. Night reigned about him. Add that in this night Osiris became lost.

There is a tale in which children sew stones inside the belly of a wolf. When he awoke, Jacques felt within him a strange load, an over-balancing weight which might have caused him to drown if, like the wolf, he had leaned over a brook to drink.

Germaine loved him, of course. But her little heart was not beginning. The match was unequal.

At the circus, a careless mother allows her child to take part in the experiment of a Chinese magician. He is put into a box. The box is opened—empty. It is closed again. Opened once more, the child appears and goes back to his seat. It is no longer the same child. But no one suspects that.

One Sunday, Jacques saw his mother. She came to get him at his tutor's. Not having understood that she was bringing away a

different son from Venice, how was she to divine his more recent metamorphosis? She thought he was looking well, although a little thin. This was to translate in maternal language his fatigue and the fire in his cheeks.

Madame Forestier was near-sighted and lived in the past: two reasons which prevented her from realizing anything clearly about the present. She adored in Jacques his resemblance to his grandmother; in her husband, the father of Jacques. She seemed cold because she carried her scruples to the point of never becoming intimate with anyone, fearing what she called infatuations. Her only friend was dead. She lived between the church, her mediocre husband, and her fears for Jacques' future. Alone with Jacques, she harassed him with tender criticism; in the company of strangers or of her husband, she praised him.

If M. Forestier appears to be effaced herefrom, it is because he effaced himself. In his youth he had suffered from a demon analogous to the one now tormenting Jacques. He had mastered it by study and marriage. But it is difficult to subdue a demon. This straight-

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forward nature became atrophied. It felt all askew. Now, M. Forestier guessed Jacques' worries; he recognized them. They discouraged him, like a victim of sarcoma who, having cured his disease at the shoulder, sees it reappear at the knee.

"Well, Jacques," said his mother; "do you feel well?"

"Yes, mother."

"Do you do your work?"

"Yes, mother."

"Who are the other boys?"

"Ordinary fellows. An Arab, an Englishman, and two kids."

"You ought to avail yourself of the opportunity of living with an Englishman to learn his language."

This sentence carried Jacques so far away from reality that he did not answer. Usually happy to accompany his mother on her errands, it seemed to him now that the time they spent together was time lost. Lying annoyed him, enveloping everything in a stifling, fictitious atmosphere. Unable to tell his mother about Germaine, he preferred that she

leave so that she might not oblige him to put distances between them.

He was in love.

He did not wish to be Germaine. He wished to possess her. For the first time in his life, his desire did not make itself known by restlessness. For the first time, he did not hate the sight of himself. He believed himself cured.

The vague desire of beauty is fatal.

We have explained how Jacques exhausted himself in desiring a void. For, are not these bodies and these faces which remain unresponsive while we gaze madly at them a void?

This time desire encountered a sensitive surface, and Germaine's response was the very image of Jacques, even as the screen rescues the film which, without this obstacle, would blossom forth only into a white sheaf. Jacques saw himself in this desire, and, for the first time, he was overwhelmed by meeting himself. He loved himself in Germaine. He was unconscious of the character he afterward

developed without trying to attain to his ideal.

Until that day, women whom he pleased had not pleased him. He knew their irresolute profiles. All the faces in the world belong to a few categories. He knew in advance that certain long-waisted brunettes would fall in love with him.

Germaine did not belong to the generation of big, intimidating girls who take their names from racehorses. But she had that something of the inaccessible, of the supernatural, which makes of a sailor on the quay at Naples or a girl playing tennis at Houlgate a melancholy memory.

One of the thousand passers-by, then, had stopped. He held her in his trap. He would love in her all the streets, all the towns on the night of arrival, the stirring temperature of seaports, Idgi and Tigrane d'Ybréo, the prairie-dog, the troop of acrobats at Geneva, and the horsewoman in the circus at Rome.

Thus he reflected ceaselessly until the train left which took Madame Forestier to Tours.

## IV

“**B**UT let up, Loute,” said Germaine to her sister. “Nestor will never notice a thing. You must present Jacques as a friend of your painter” (for the pluto-crat knew she was unfaithful to his brother and his selfishness rejoiced therein). “He loves to be in on everything, and we run less risk.”

Osiris was prodigiously credulous. His mistress flattered this sense of security by letting him share in the plot against Lazare.

On one of the first evenings when Nestor was asleep beside her, a young actor whom she loved mistook the date and rang at her door.

“Get out of sight,” she said to Osiris; “it’s my old man.” (“My old man” is the common phrase for the fellow who pays the bills.)

Osiris arose, gathered up his effects, went into a clothes closet, stifled there while Germaine received the young man, and came out puffed with pride.

Their liaison dated from that master stroke. Do not conclude from this that the girl was low. She was defending herself. She acted without calculation.

When they were still children, she and her sister dreamed of the Palais de Glace which they imagined to be a palace of mirrors. They went into it one Sunday and came out followed by an escort of swells. One of these seduced Germaine.

When he abandoned her, she found work in a hatshop in Montmartre. The owner said to her one day: "Dearie, they are going to close me up the day after tomorrow. Look after the shop; I'm going to skip out." She took with her only some linen and her pearls.

Germaine stayed, put a sign in the window announcing the sale of hats worth two hun-

dred francs at twenty-five francs, sold out in one morning, replaced them in the showcases by shopworn stock found in the cellar, rented a cart with the proceeds, carried off the chairs, table, and a full-length mirror from the shop to her room, and let the bailiff take the rest.

She was possessed by the demon of the streets. She was not ashamed of it.

Dining with Loute, Nestor, and Lazarre in a fashionable restaurant, she spilled some wine. The head-waiter ran forward and unrolled an oil cloth over the spot while waiting for fresh linen. The oil cloth awoke the same memory simultaneously in the two sisters. They exchanged a glance. Loute blushed, but Germaine exclaimed:

"Oh! an oil cloth! I can see Belleville again, the lamp, the soup, and Pa Râteau."

Their real name was Râteau. Since Nestor had appeared, Pa and Ma Râteau had nothing to complain of. They owned a charming farm in the neighborhood of Paris.

These sisters, the Râteau farm, the Osiris brothers, Jacques, his family, his dream, form an explosive mixture. However, destiny had

composed it. Destiny loves to handle men chemically.

If the desires of Jacques were becoming crystallized, and if we were approaching their multitude as we approached Germaine, was the result therefore morally more acceptable?

Narcissus fell in love with himself. For this crime, the gods changed him into a flower. This flower gives one a headache, and its bulb, unlike a real onion, does not even make one weep. Does he merit other tears?

The story of our Narcissus is more complicated. He loved the waters of the river. But rivers flow without regard for bathers, or for the trees they reflect. Their desire is the sea. They embrace it at the end of a perpetual voyage, and they drown in it voluptuously.

Jacques had always felt that human beauty had, like rivers, a bed and a goal. It passed on; it went elsewhere. A ship raises anchor, the curtain of a music-hall falls, the Ybréo family returns to its gods. He remembered

that Idgi had said to him during a tennis game that he looked like Seti the First. It was the only glance from the river that he recalled.

This time the water stopped, sent back passionately his own image. He cheated the sea. Perhaps he took the voice of a nymph to be the voice of the water. But he did not analyse it. His heart no longer left him the leisure for analysis.

We have said that Germaine's heart was often mobilized. This habit in no wise deprived her caprices of enthusiasm. She loved each time for the first time. She wondered how she had been able to love other men, and played her new hand with her cards face up on the table. She did not try to prolong the flame by covering it with ashes. She flared as high as possible, and as quickly.

Her power of putting herself sincerely into a primitive state prevented her from opposing to Jacques' flame the mechanical impulse of

a girl broken to the sport. The tempest mingled their treasures, whatever the origin of these. For, if Jacques had wasted much but brought his dreams, Germaine, who had given greatly, had greatly received. She did not, therefore, greet him empty-handed.

This last sentence lends itself to double meaning. There, too, the impulse carried Jacques beyond scruple. The plutocrat was a husband, a deceived husband.

Germaine found it so legitimate to deceive Nestor that she felt not the shadow of a care about it. Unconsciousness is contagious. Jacques took naturally to the subterfuge which consisted in playing the part of a friend of the painter.

The introductory dinner amused him. During dessert, Germaine tutoyed him absent-mindedly. He sat on her right.

“Hast read X’s article? . . .”

“Art dumb?” she added almost without transition, turning to her left where Nestor sat stupefied, fleeced, disarmed by this prodigious three-shell trick. Later, they laughed over the danger they had run.

Osiris took a fancy to Jacques. He thought he had a gift for figures. So absurd a judgment came from the fact that Jacques listened to him. People listened to him, or they did not. This crude distinction was the only one he made between men, lacking that sense which indicates to us the originality of each individual.

The real meetings of the lovers took place in the rue Daubigny in a ground-floor flat as dark as the canvases of this painter.

This bachelor apartment belonged to Germaine. She gave as pretext that she needed a place to which to fly from Nestor's visits. According to her explanation it was only now, for the first time, that this flat really filled a need. She believed it. She was afraid of Madame Supplice, the concierge. Not that the concierge might think "Still another!" but that she might be shocked never to see her come in alone again.

Even the most impassioned caresses have a limit. Jacques, quasi-virgin, was trying to

satisfy a limitless desire. The first embrace disappointed him. At length, the vertigo ceased, his glance and his mind became agile once more.

Then, contemplating this recumbent Desdemona dying on her pillow, frighteningly pale, her teeth bared, he loaded his soul with shameful memories of her face, and withdrew from her like a knife.

Germaine distributed quickly her full-blown caresses. Hers was the luxury of a florist's bouquet. The bouquet fades; you buy another. As for Jacques, he took root. His abnormal love grew slowly, normally. He loved himself, he loved travel, he loved too many things in his mistress. Germaine loved only her lover.

## V

THIS existence necessitated certain stratagems in the rue de l'Estrapade, where Jacques idled away the hours which Germaine and Osiris spent together.

For his afternoons, he invented some work at the Sainte-Geneviève Library.

This library is the alibi of all the scamps of the Latin Quarter. If all those who used it thus really turned up, it would be necessary to add a wing to the building. Reconciled with Mahieddine and Louise, Jacques slept out one night in four. The Arab and he left the outer door half-open. They shut it at dawn when they returned from a visit to their mistresses.

Louise received Mahieddine at her flat. The two accomplices met at the gates of the Parc Monceau and waited for the first underground

train. This condemned man's departure was not at all funny. They dozed among the laborers who were on their way to work.

To hoodwink the tutor required no great cleverness. He saw nothing, nor wished to see anything. He was content if his pupils were prompt in attendance and in the payment of their monthly fees.

But his wife saw. She saw awry. She was convinced that Jacques was mad about her, was incapable of deceiving his master, and fled her presence to try to forget with the help of the girls at the Café Soufflet. She approved the Arab's looking after him.

Every Sunday, Stopwell found a mysterious spring with which he won broad-jumping contests. During the week he was a rag, watched for the postman who was always about to bring him a cheque, lived in a cloud

of pipe smoke and teapot steam. His great body was strewn about his room. After dinner, he put on a silk house-suit and slept like a dead weight, poisoned by tobacco.

Petitcopain served this despot with the glance of girls who nurse madmen in hospitals. He divided himself between this task and that of sentinel, a job he had from Mahieddine. He did not resent Peter. He discovered under the Englishman's attitude a crowd of infirmities whose nature he did not understand but because of which he guessed Stopwell to be vulnerable. He inhaled, with the aroma of blond tobacco, the poetry of England. He submitted to Stopwell in the same way as Latins submit, little by little, to London, that sleep-inducing poppy, that healthy, rosy-cheeked city with a heart of coal. He loved in him slumber, a kingly chess set, hinds on the grass, dukes who marry actresses, Chinese on the banks of the Thames.

Stopwell's rare words were uttered in praise of Oxford, paradise of colleges and shops, where one finds the best Hellenists and the most beautiful gloves in the world.

Seated by a dormer window like a princess in her tower, young Maricelles, by dint of hoping, had fallen ill. He was being nursed at the country seat of the Maricelles family near Maricelles-les-Maricelles, an address sufficient to divert the boarders and to provide conversation at table.

One Wednesday in November, when Germaine and Jacques had agreed to meet Bachtarzi at Louise's flat, they found waiting there a skinny little woman without a hat, wearing an emerald pendant. It was her mother. Jacques recognized with amazement Madame Supplice, the concierge of the rue Daubigny. The building belonged to one of Louise's ex-protectors. Germaine had never told him a word about it.

"Good morning, madame," said Germaine. "What a dress you have on! Is Louise at home?"

"No," replied the concierge in a monotonous voice; "*mademoiselle has not come in yet.*"

They sat down. They coughed. But Madame Supplice was quickly tamed. She launched forth into a eulogy of Mahieddine whom she took to be a Turkish prince.

As a matter of fact Mahieddine, timid enough before hard-headed people, from whom he hid his romantic stories, lost all control of himself with shopkeepers and simple souls. They could guess, from Madame Supplice's relation, delivered on a single tone without commas or periods, the kind of tales he probably told her for want of audacity to shine in higher circles.

Jacques dare not look at Germaine. He would have been greatly surprised to see that she was not laughing. She was smiling. She got up.

"Good mother Lili!" she exclaimed. "Always the same." And she tapped the concierge familiarly on the knee.

Louise and Mahieddine came in. They appeared to be annoyed at the encounter. Mahieddine even more than Louise.

May a writer interpolate into the middle of his book a story that overflows it? Yes, if the story serves to accentuate a character. It is important to stress the fact that Louise was a good girl, but a Supplice-Champagne good girl.

Before this book begins, Louise was a dancer at the Eldorado. Four schoolboys used to come and throw bouquets of violets at her. On the first of January, they wanted to give her a pendant. The rascal of the group stole an emerald from an aged relative. He agreed foolishly to draw lots to see which of them should present it to her. The lot fell upon the shyest of them. Louise rewarded him with a caress. They said to one another that an emerald to an actress was as a drop of water to the ocean. They forgot that the ocean existed because of drops of water.

Long after the episode which ends this book the shy boy, become a diplomat, met Louise. They raked up old memories.

“Do you remember the false emerald?” she asked. “I gave it to my mother. She was

never without it. She wanted it to be buried with her."

The diplomat told her of the theft, and that the emerald was genuine. Louise grew pale.

"Can you swear to it?" she demanded. And he dared not swear to it, because Louise looked suddenly like a ghoul.

### Back to the rue Montchanin.

The two couples frequented a skating rink. They went there now. They were acquainted with the professionals and the barman.

A young man with the face of a laundress who wore a cape and a string of pearls, walked about among the tables, smiling at some, pushing others aside, crying that he was seasick because he had whirled so much. His affected voice was like the ridiculous curlycues of Victorian decoration.

Anywhere else this monster would have been stoned. Here he was a fetish. People flattered him and were proud when he spoke to them. He shook hands with Germaine and

Louise, and waved his hand at the men with the air of a great coquette.

In vain did the shadow-half of Jacques send to his light-half a sense of moral discomfort. He had adopted a halting rhythm. It suited him. He ran along the roofs without dizziness, with the tread of a somnambulist.

The monster deigned to sit with them a moment. In a voice now somewhat muffled, he calculated the value of Louise's rings. He showed them his own. He told stories of police raids.

When all things move at once, nothing appears to be in motion.

In order that Jacques become aware of his soul's inaction, a fixed point was essential. He might have imagined, for example, his father or mother crossing the rink. But he was acting far from them, far from himself, leaning complacently on his elbows to gaze into dirty water. Alone in such a place, he would have been disgusted. Mingled with Germaine who spoke on a level of equality with the fetish, he felt no revulsion and let himself float with the tide.

The orchestra played a popular air.

Popularity dies young. This is what makes its superficiality so profound. The self-assurance of success and the melancholy of its immediate disappearance enhanced this dance. All its notes were one day to bore holes into Jacques' heart.

They skated.

During an intermission, while the monster was performing alone, Louise cried out: "You!" and, taking their eyes from the rink, they all perceived Osiris: jovial, leaning on his stick, the reflections of the electric globes in his nose, his top hat, and his pearl tie-pin.

"Me; yes, my children. Me. And rather satisfied, too. For several days I have been flooded with anonymous letters saying that Germaine spent her days at the rink with a lover. I wanted to see for myself, and I see now that it is false. There you are," he concluded; and, putting his hand on Jacques' shoulder, he said to him: "My dear fellow, I don't want to say anything disagreeable (all tastes are natural), but, between ourselves, you are not her type."

He sat down. Germaine pummeled him with her fists, threatened him, and regained her composure.

“Besides,” he went on, unfolding a card-case; “it seems to me that I recognize Lazare’s handwriting. Perhaps this is his revenge. Here, my little Jacques; take these letters; look them over. You youngsters nowadays are brought up à la Raffles; you will be able to figure this out better than an old imbecile like me.”

“Does she love her old imbecile,” he lisped, chucking Germaine under the chin; “does she love him?”

And Germaine, back on her high horse, safely in the saddle, answered:

“No. She does not. She doesn’t love sneaks.”

Jacques’ life resembled the never tidied rooms of the women of Montmartre who get

up at four in the afternoon, slip on a cloak over their nightdress, and go down to get a bite to eat.

This state of things always grows worse. Nestor showed no more letters, nor did he laugh again. He did not suspect Jacques, despite precise accusations. He suspected Germaine. Conceit blinding him, he was willing to admit that she might deceive him with a man of his corpulence and of his age, with what he called naïvely her type, but that it might be with little Jacques cost him too much to believe. He did not even stop to consider it. He confided in Jacques, and asked him to watch Germaine.

“I have to live at the Exchange, and I often work at night. Follow her. Never leave her. Do this for me.”

Now Nestor Osiris made scenes. He did not threaten as yet: he smashed bric-a-brac. Germaine noticed that he gave her, after each reconciliation, a Copenhagen animal. Thus he was able to break and to break little. He avoided pots and terra cotta objects.

But when he smashed a Dresden group,

Germaine realized that the farce was turning into a drama. He forced drawers, hunted for signs, bribed manicurists, lost his head.

One afternoon, coming in from the dentist's he found Germaine reclining in a chaise-longue. He asked if anyone had come to see her. Germaine said no, that she had been dozing and reading since luncheon. This was the truth.

Nestor went out to hang up his fur coat in the entry. He reappeared brandishing a cane with a tortoise-shell handle.

"And this! And this!" he shouted. "Since your friend leaves his canes in my entry, I am going to correct you with them."

Germaine shut her book.

"You're crazy," she said. "Get out of here."

The telephone rang.

"Don't touch the receiver," cried Nestor. "If it's the cane-man, I shall speak to him."

It was, as it happened, about the cane. The dentist phoned to ask M. Osiris if he had not made a mistake, for another patient had just found a cane marked N. O. instead of his own, which had a tortoise-shell handle.

Germaine enjoyed a modest triumph. This episode brought her four days of peace.

On Sundays, the Osiris brothers went hunting. They usually left at five on Saturdays, and Germaine was free. But this Saturday, Nestor stayed, sacrificing the hunt. It was a gallant manner of obtaining her forgiveness. Germaine hid her disappointment. She notified Jacques. He would remain quietly in the rue de l'Estrapade and would go to bed early.

At nine o'clock, Jacques was reading in his room like all the other pupils with the exception of Mahieddine, for whom the hunting season remained open, when a hesitant ring sounded on his floor.

Petitcopain, who served as concierge, after having opened and whispered, knocked on Jacques' door. He announced a visitor. It was Germaine. She carried a bag. Jacques could not believe his eyes. A reflex prompted him to shove a pair of old socks under the dresser with his foot. Germaine laughed at his amazement.

She had become bored at table with Nestor. She had said to him:

"Wait a moment. I am going out into the kitchen to make a surprise salad!" She had collected some linen, a few toilet articles, and had slipped out by the servant's stairway.

"Don't scold me, my love," she begged. "I am free, free, free. Let him break everything. I'm going to take you on a honeymoon."

There are roads which look so changed when we go back over them that the returning stroller feels himself lost. A village in which one lives, seen suddenly from a hill, may be mistaken for another village. From the fact of Germaine's presence in the rue de l'Estrapade, Jacques scarcely recognized his mistress and did not recognize his room at all.

It took him one minute to realize what she was proposing, which was to take the train and spend Sunday on the Râteau farm, the old man and his wife having gone to Havre.

After the first shock, he was as wild about it as she. They baptised this trip *Around the World in Eighty Days*, after Jules Verne's

book. Jacques had to go down to see the tutor's wife and tell her that he was going out and would not be back before the study hour on Monday morning.

Not wishing to leave Germaine in his room for fear that Stopwell might come in, he shut her in Maricelles' empty quarters with a lamp and some cigarettes. There, they were out of danger.

On the lower floor Jacques found the tutor and his wife regulating the clock. He had to wait until it had struck all the hours and half-hours. Then Jacques, who went out every Saturday evening, announced that he was going to spend Sunday at the home of a friend in the country. The Berlins gave permission, provided that he turn up in his master's office on Monday morning. Jacques went back upstairs, unlocked Germaine, and they made their preparations.

Everything went into one bag. This circumstance delighted them. They stifled frantic laughter. Jacques, continuing to play the game of *Around the World*, whispered that they must take care in passing the cabin of a

ferocious Englishman who wore red sideburns, a satchel filled with banknotes, and a veil of butterfly-net tulle. He had been trailing them since Liverpool and was plotting their ruin.

They went down without mishap, using up an entire box of matches, and found Germaine's cab at the corner of the rue Mouffetard.

## VI

THIS trip should be described with the aid of the charming paraphernalia of a prestidigitator. Flags, bouquets, lanterns, eggs, goldfish.

That Germaine retained her down was miraculous, for it had been frequently plucked. Against mud Jacques possessed a protective covering like that fat which keeps swans dry in water. Each of them went by the first snow-laden trees, the first cattle, like a night rover threading his way at five in the morning through the carts at the Central Markets.

But this is unimportant. Germaine was of farmer stock. She was returning to a lost Paradise, while Jacques was no longer Jacques but Germaine; that is to say, one of those high wagons, so fresh at dawn on the Place de la

Concorde, when they cradle their market-gardeners like idle kings on litters of cabbages and roses.

Truly, Germaine put one off the track. One was almost ready to mistake the prestidigitator for springtime itself, manipulating its traps and false bottoms. How could these false first fruits not seem real to Jacques who had accepted the fetish of the skating rink?

*A thousand roads lead away from white,* says Montaigne; *one leads toward it.* Jacques was moving toward white. He took Germaine in his arms, warmed her in the railway carriage, and gave himself up to a thousand childish pleasures.

Jacques appeared unattractive to himself but not to others. Germaine and he made a charming couple. They were taken for a naïve pair of lovers on an outing.

What spontaneity! What surprises! But the poor girl could produce these surprises now only from her sleeves. Jacques could not see the strings any more than children who applaud. It is after all much to be able to make children applaud. Germaine, familiar with

her old tricks, believed sincerely that she was picking watches and doves out of the air. The magician believed with the public in her own magic.

Thus, this escape was the only wholesome happiness they ever knew.

The farm was small. Germaine spoke familiarly to the servants and the cows. She marched about, nipped by a troop of puppies. She shouted, she jumped, she let down her hair.

They lunched in a room where the grate-fire was a conflagration. They ate clean food, such as is never eaten in towns. The cheese alone, expertly ripened in a vine-leaf, contrasted with the meats and the white cream.

After luncheon, Germaine showed Jacques her father's room. He was an incurable old drunkard. In the middle of his bedroom hung a chandelier adorned with multi-colored paper. On a dresser stood bleached photographs of sailors and wedding parties, while under a bell-glass was half of a frigate pasted against green, painted waves.

"Me as a virgin," said Germaine, handing

Jacques a sea-shell frame. It enclosed a naked baby.

She had a room in the house. They slept in it and adored each other for the last time. Did Jacques have a presentiment of this? Not the least in the world. Nor Germaine. They were right, since they were to enjoy love frequently thereafter.

Two days later they left at dawn without fatigue. They heard the contagious roosters take fire from one another like the jets in a vast gas chandelier. Everything was frozen, wet, virginal. Germaine bravely wore a red nose. She did not present a wrinkle to the pure morning.

She had discovered an old photograph in her wardrobe. She squinted in it as if she were near-sighted. Jacques thought this grimace divine. Germaine gave him the picture.

They brought back in addition eggs and cheese. They had really made a trip around the world.

So soon, Germaine had forgotten the aspect of the streets of Paris. This surprise prolonged the escapade. It meant taking up old habits without regret. The cries of the street-vendors, the skinny runners training behind bicycles, the servants beating carpets out of windows, the steaming horses, brought back her childhood.

They decided that after study hour, Jacques would come to lunch at her flat. They took a taxi from the station for she wished to drop him first.

The chauffeur drove like a madman, skidding, grazing the safety islands in the middle of the streets. Germaine and Jacques played about, kissed on the mouth, knocking their teeth against one another, were bounced and thrown in every direction. At each new feat, the chauffeur turned round, raised his shoulders, and winked at them.

Germaine dropped Jacques in the rue de l'Estrapade at about ten o'clock after a long embrace. He stood looking after her waving glove while the cab went on. He arrived just in time to change and appear at the exact

minute, like Phineas Fogg, in the room where M. Berlin was trying to teach geography to his fellow students and himself.

Germaine went into a booth and telephoned home. Josephine, who had been instructed to say to Osiris, on that extraordinary evening, that she had not seen madame go out, told her of the poor man's rage, his search, his prayers, and his epithets. He had broken a mirror and cried, for he was superstitious. He had spent Sunday tramping back and forth in the room, waiting for the ring of the telephone or the sound of an automobile. Finally, Sunday evening, he had said calmly:

"Josephine, whether madame returns or not, I leave her. You may tell her that from me. Get my things together. I leave the rest to her. Let her do with it as she pleases."

"Whew!" sighed Germaine. "Good riddance."

She knew that a good-looking girl need never be at a loss.

When she arrived, her sister was waiting for her,

"Didn't I tell you exactly what would happen?" Loute cried. "Nestor doesn't want to see you again. If anyone speaks of you, he spits."

"Let him spit," Germaine answered. "I am just back from the country with Jacques. I'm stifling. Nestor smells like a musty room."

"How are you going to live?"

"Don't you worry, little girl. Besides, Nestor is fly-paper. He sticks. I'll bet anything he'll try to come back."

Osiris came back so quickly that he met Loute on her way out. Germaine, having gone to bed, kept him waiting.

When he came into her room he stopped short, bowed, and sat down on a chair at the foot of the bed.

"My dear Germaine," he began.

"Is it to be a speech?"

He took a pose.

"My dear Germaine, all is over between us. I'm through. I wrote you a letter to break things off, but as I know your negligence and the way you read letters, I came to read it to you myself."

"Do you know," she inquired, "that you are going beyond the limit of idiocy?"

"That is possible," Nestor admitted, "but you will listen to my letter."

He drew it out of his pocket.

"I won't listen."

"You will listen."

"I won't."

"You will."

"I won't."

"Very well. I'll read it just the same."

She stopped her ears and commenced to hum. Osiris, in the voice of a man accustomed to shouting quotations at the Exchange, began:

"My poor little fool . . ."

Germaine burst into laughter.

"Madame laughs, madame hears," remarked Nestor. "Therefore, I continue."

But this time Germaine sang with all her strength and reading became impossible. Nestor put the letter carefully down on his thigh.

"All right," he said; "I quit."

She took her hands from her ears.

"Only,—" he shook his forefinger threaten-

ingly; "I warn you that if you do not let me read, I'll go. And you'll never see me again."

"But your letter breaks things off."

"There are breaks and breaks," sputtered this man who possessed the gift of numbers, which is to say of poetry, and who was a complete idiot in love where poetry does not exist. "I want to break nicely, decently, and you drive me out. It isn't as if I were asking an accounting of you."

"I don't owe you an accounting," Germaine cried, exasperated by this farce; "and if you want an accounting, here it is: Yes, I am unfaithful to you. Yes, I have a lover. Yes, I am living with Jacques." And at each yes she pulled on her braid as if it were a bell-cord.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Osiris, backing up and squinting his eyes like a painter.

And he accused Germaine of turning suspicion against an obliging kid in the hope that he, Osiris, would run off to find the lad while she received her real lover. He added that he was not to be fooled: that he was perhaps one of those rich men over whose eyes wool is easily

pulled, but that being rich was a profession, a difficult profession, which trained one to see clearly.

Germaine marvelled. Despite having seen such people on the stage, she could not believe they existed.

"You're a wonder, Nestor," she said. "I am living with Jacques. In fact"—there was a ring at the door—"there he is now. He is coming to lunch. Hide somewhere, and you'll have your proof."

She wanted to break with him.

"Hide somewhere," Osiris sneered. "That's too easy. I know your tricks. You'll make signs to him. I stay."

And as they heard the sound of the opening door and Jacques' voice behind the scenes: "My dear Jacques," he cried; "do you know Germaine's latest?"

Jacques came in.

"That you are her lover!"

Jacques, through contact with Germaine, had learned her tricks. He took in the scene

at a glance and saw that his mistress, dead tired, had given away the show.

"Easy there, M. Osiris," he said. "You know that Germaine is a tease. She is teasing you because she is in love with you."

He acted so well, this pure heart, that Nestor stayed to luncheon and opened a box of cigars.

Queens of Egypt! In this richly painted box lie your mummies wound in golden sashes.

Osiris ate, smoked, laughed, and went off to the Exchange.

Germaine sulked and reproached Jacques for his cleverness.

"Don't you want to have me to yourself alone?"

"I don't want to be responsible for anything so serious and have you reproach me some day."

The farm, the cream, and the eggs were far away.

When Lazare questioned his brother, Nestor slapped him on the shoulder.

"Germaine is a character," said he. "That's

what makes her different from the rest. Nothing can ever change her. She was out at her farm. She needed the cows. We men on the Exchange can't understand anything like that. Loute is simpler, she's—what shall I say?—less lively, less picturesque. Of course, she has her points. I'm going to stick to Germaine."

This episode seemed to admit Osiris into their secret. Insinuations and anonymous letters made him smile with a superior air, as if he knew a secret thanks to which Germaine could set evil tongues wagging, but only to the advantage of her rich lover. This vague secret consisted in a belief in the superiority of his mistress, her love of nature, and of dog breeding. When he was asked, "Where is Germaine," he always answered: "I let her run free; I don't interfere with her."

Loute was stupefied. Lacking assurance and genius, she found her sister extraordinary.

## VII

THINGS dragged on in the way that soiled linen, boxes, and combs lie strewn about a hotel room. Jacques did not suffer from this untidiness. He did not see it. He saw only through the eyes of his mîstrêss, who had always lived in this way.

A new element was added to the confusion.

For three weeks past Germaine had been receiving bad news of her father. She felt no affection for him, and burned the letters.

Louise used to say: "You know, in our trade we have to go out nights."

But Germaine, who thought herself more "respectable" than Louise, looked down a little upon her, and imagined that to dissemble the condition of Pa Râteau would leave her more free. She even pretended to believe that her mother exaggerated, and was panicky over nothing.

One evening, as she was dressing to go to a revue with Jacques and Osiris, Jacques found a wire carelessly hidden under the telephone. *Father dying come immediately love.* She had hidden it in order to be able to go to the theatre. Jacques showed it to her in silence.

“Never mind,” she said, rouging her lips and rubbing them against each other. “I’ll go down tomorrow.”

Pa Râteau flickered out at eleven o’clock on his farm during the intermission.

For two weeks, Madame Râteau had been reading aloud to him *The Bather’s House*, in which a mechanical ceiling crushes Siete-Iglesias. Râteau confused this chapter with reality. He thought himself Iglesias and died in the presence of his horror-stricken wife, really crushed by the ceiling of his room, lying on the floor, his face against it in profile, trying to make himself as small as possible.

M. Râteau bequeathed to his wife that which he owed to his daughter, and he prescribed that

he was to be buried in the family vault at Père Lachaise. Osiris ordered a hearse.

Loute was on bad terms with her mother. As Germaine refused to go to the farm by herself to fetch the body, Jacques asked special leave in the rue de l'Estrapade. Nestor was to let them have his car which kept in the road better than the limousine. The hearse was to precede them to the farm by a half-day.

This trip to the country was not like the previous one. The chauffeur had a little mirror which enabled him to see behind his back. They had to be prudent.

Germaine planned their return. She was fond of her mother. She proposed to put her up for two weeks in Paris. She had three rooms over her apartment which served as storerooms. Orders were given to bring down some furniture from the storerooms into the linenroom, and to furnish the rooms with the remainder. Madame Râteau would have her own little corner.

Her daughter calculated, planned, grew affectionate. Incapable of pretending, except to Nestor, she did not shed a tear over a

drunken father who had beaten her too often. She saw his death as her mother's deliverance.

Madame Râteau came out to meet them. She was crying. In one hand she held a handkerchief; in the other, a Spanish fan.

Since she had stopped working, she had let her nails grow out, and, not knowing what to do with her hands, she never put down this fan. Her body looked like a lotto sack. She had commonplace, regular features and pimples; she wore a white wig which accentuated a complexion resembling that of an English judge.

Her daughter presented Jacques. The widow raised upon him the eyes of a person suffering from seasickness.

The coffin was in the room where the young couple had lunched in the course of their voyage *Around the World*.

Germaine went through her part with tact. She decided that Madame Râteau would ride in the automobile with them, and that the hearse would follow.

Each time the word hearse was pronounced, Madame Râteau shook her head and repeated:

“A hearse. . . . A hearse. . . .”

The return was terrible. Germaine rapped on the window. She restrained the chauffeur so that M. Râteau might follow. Suddenly, she turned, looked out of the back window, and cried:

“Where is he?”

The road stretched away to the horizon without a sign of the hearse.

They stopped, and went back to hunt the body. They found it. It was stuck at a crossing. A wheel had to be changed. The jack refused to work. Jacques and the chauffeur had to help. After an hour of difficulty, which Madame Râteau, worn with gulping and crying, encouraged by nodding her head, they went on.

To crown their felicity, Jacques' silence made Germaine nervous, and she dropped him in the rue de l'Estrapade, so that the drivers of the hearse were able to imagine for a moment that they were conducting an illustrious corpse to the Panthéon.

Madame Râteau's mourning busied the dressmakers and modistes then in favor. Germaine, finding it respectable to have a widowed mother, showed her off. She took her to her shops. Madame Râteau enjoyed this luxury. Wherever she went, she sampled crêpe. She had dresses, negligees, hats, coats, jackets, and capes of it. She was very careful of her mourning attire and never went out if it threatened rain. For, said she, crêpe ought to be worn on bright days.

But just as we do not hesitate to put gaily colored flowers about a coffin, so Madame Râteau would not give up her fan. One Sunday, when Germaine took her to Versailles, incidentally inflicting this drudgery on Jacques, the silence which reigned in the automobile as far as the gates of the Bois de Boulogne gave him a chance to study the fan.

It represented the death of Gallito.

Nothing looks so much like a sunset as a bull-fight. The bull, lowering gracefully his powerful neck and his broad, curly, Antinous-like forehead, looked at the crowd and sunk his

right horn into the belly of the recumbent matador. Half way up the picture, on the left, a picador on a bleeding horse that looked like a Spanish Christ, for you could count its ribs, tried to stab the simple beast which was shaking a bouquet of banderillas in its shoulders. A man was leaping the barrier at the extreme left, and, like the archer in the frieze of the Temple of Egina who, they say, shoots on one knee to fill the angle, a hunchbacked stable-boy was filling the extreme right with his hump.

Jacques was bored. The crêpe intimidated him. He dared not take Germaine's knees between his own.

“Gallito,” he repeated stupidly to himself; “Gallito, Gal, gal, gal.” And this *gal* brought to his mind Victor Hugo’s couplet:

*Gall, amant de la reine, alla, tour magnanime,  
Galamment, de l’arène à la Tour Magne, à Nîme.*

Immediately, he spoke them softly aloud, as one might hum.

"What are you reciting?" asked Germaine.

"Nothing. I just remembered two lines by Victor Hugo."

"Begin them again."

*"Gall, amant de la reine, alla, tour magnanime,  
Galamment, de l'arène à la Tour Magne, à Nîme."*

"What does that mean?"

"*Gall*: a man named Gall; *amant de la reine*: who was the queen's lover; *alla*: went; *tour magnanime*: nice of him to do it; *galamment*: gallantly, in knightly fashion; *de l'arène*: from the arena, as on your mother's fan; *à la Tour Magne*: to a Tower called Magne; *à Nîme*: to Nîmes, the town."

"*Anime la ville?*" (Animates the town?)

"No. Nîmes, Nîmes, the town of Nîmes."

"And then what?"

"Why, nothing."

"He was making fun of you, this Victor Hugo, when he wrote those lines."

"But it's done purposely; it's a stunt."

"I don't think it's funny."

"It isn't meant to be funny."

"I don't understand a word you're saying."

"They are two lines exactly alike when you hear them, and different when you look at them."

"Explain it to me."

"These two lines, instead of rhyming at the end, rhyme from one end to the other."

"Then it isn't poetry, if the lines are the same."

"But they are not the same, since each one says a different thing. It is a great feat."

"I don't see how it's a great feat. I could do great feats by the dozen if all you have to do is to repeat the same thing twice in succession, and call it poetry."

"But my dear little Germaine, listen: you don't listen to me."

"That's right. Call me a fool."

"Oh! Germaine!"

"Let's say no more about it, since I am incapable of understanding it."

"I never said you were incapable of understanding it. You ask me to explain these lines: I explain them, and you grow angry."

"Me? Me angry? The idea! I don't care a hang about your Victor Hugo."

"In the first place, he is not my Victor Hugo. In the next place, I love you. Those lines are stupid. Let's say no more about them."

"You didn't think they were stupid a moment ago. Now you call them stupid because you want me to let you alone."

"We have never quarrelled before. Are we going to quarrel now for such a silly reason?"

"Just as you please. I ask you a simple question, and because you are thinking of something else and I disturb you, you treat me as though I were a baby."

"I can't make you out, Germaine."

"Me neither."

This cheap scene, the first between Germaine and Jacques, took place after they had left the Bois de Boulogne. Following her "me neither," Germaine turned her back and looked out at the trees. Madame Râteau continued to fan herself. They reached Versailles and stopped for refreshment at the Hôtel des Reservoirs. Still Germaine and her mother remained silent.

On the way back, Germaine broke the silence, saying in a docile voice:

“Jacques, my love, those lines. . . .”

“Yes?”

“Will you teach them to me?”

“Listen. I will repeat them slowly:

“*Gall—amant—de la reine—all—a tour—magna-nime,*

*Galamment—de—l’arène—à la Tour Magne—à Nîme.*”

“But you see that they are the same thing!”

“No, they’re not.”

“You say ‘no, they’re not’ and you don’t prove anything.”

“There is nothing to prove. It is a famous example.

“Is it famous?”

“Yes.”

“Very famous?”

“Yes.”

“Then how does it happen that I don’t know it?”

“Because you are not interested in literature.”

"That's what I just said. I'm a fool."

"Listen to me, Germaine. You are the contrary of a fool, but today you frighten me. You are trying purposely to frighten me."

"Well. That's the last straw."

"How sad it is to be wounded by so silly a thing."

"I didn't ask you to say it."

"Enough. I'm sick of this. Now I ask you to keep still."

Thus they continued to stick pins into each other until they had reached the gates. Then Madame Râteau came out of her stupor.

"All that, my children," she said as she folded her fan; "all that doesn't alter the fact that this Gall was the queen's lover."

This maternal judgment bore witness to a perfect sense of reality. Madame Râteau spoke little but well. It was either: "My poor husband was wiped out in an hour"; or: "What, Monsieur Jacques! Paris used to be called Lutetia? First I ever heard of it."

As she was praising a "superb statue of Henri IV," Jacques asked her mechanically if this were an equestrian statue. She hesita-

ted before answering: "More or less," thus defining the Centaur in a word.

Germaine held her sides. Madame Râteau was vexed. Jacques was sinking into a quicksand.

The day after the Gall affair he woke up sad.

A man who has undergone an operation longs for a cold drink; another with spinal trouble who will never be able to sit up draws pictures of chairs. Jacques thought of the discreet wives who help men in their work and found families. But he repulsed this thirst for cold water as if it were a thirst for alcohol.

One night, as he held Germaine in his arms, he whispered to her that he would like to have a child. Germaine admitted that this joy could never be hers.

"I should have had one already," she said, "if it were possible. I breed fox-terriers to console myself."

The peach betrays its worm. Almost all have worms to conceal. Poor Jacques. It would have been very unwise to exchange his fate, as he desired, for that of the royal beasts who propagate. If one were to put on their guise, would not there come suddenly a realization of a fundamental infirmity in these beasts, something quite outside those imperfections which escape the eye between the trees of a forest, or in the smoke of cafés?

These successive weights did not detach Jacques from Germaine. Rather did he pity her. Therefore, he pitied himself. His love grew and slumbered like a cradled child.

Germaine was given a surprise party. Sucre-en-Poudre's crowd came to tea without warning.

Sucre-en-Poudre was sixty years old and looked twenty-five. Her regimen consisted in drinking nothing but champagne, and sleeping only with jockeys or professional dancers. She ran an opium den. Her clients put on

Japanese robes made of *crepe de Chine*, and, lying in heaps on small rugs, smoked while the late Caruso sang *Pagliaccio*.

These delightful people shouted, wrestled, and boxed.

Toward seven o'clock they all squeezed into a market basket driven by a chauffeur who was as pallid, deaf, dumb, and blind as a cocaine statue.

Jacques and Germaine went up to Madame Râteau's flat and saw her seated with her back to the door. Only her fan stirred,

"Hello ma."

"Hello."

"Your voice sounds queer."

"No, no."

"Yes it does."

"It doesn't."

"But it does, Madame Râteau; your voice sounds queer. Jacques noticed it too. There is something up."

"Well," said the widow then; "since you insist, I admit I think it was strange of you to give a party without asking me down."

"Oh, but look here, mother; you don't know

what you're saying. In the first place, you're in mourning." (Her daughter forgot that she shared this mourning.) "And besides, I can't have you meeting Madame Sucre, you know."

This extraordinary pretext opened a secret door to Jacques. For, just as a woman looks at a magazine on the cover of which may be seen this same woman looking at the same magazine and so on until the picture disappears but goes on just the same; so when we believe ourselves to have touched the bottom of a social class, we find that there still exists a multitude capable of pronouncing these words which a king once uttered: "I am farther removed from my sister than she from her chief gardener."

Jacques accepted all this. He lived too entirely in his mistress to be able to judge her acts or those of her family. Now it is his shadow-half which, like a cuttle fish, spurts a cloud of ink over his bright-half. After having sent him help, it blinds him gradually.

Louise's gift to herself was Mahieddine, and Mahieddine's Louise. This loveless exchange made them gay. They carried on an indecent pleasure party parallel with the Jacques-Germaine drama.

Louise received cheques from a foreign prince. This prince was heir to a crown, and he left his future kingdom rarely. He came away only to attend those conferences which call the great together in London. Thereafter, he spent two weeks with Louise. He used to tell her the secrets of Europe, and that the childish kings, parked together, played practical jokes by switching the shoes that are put outside hotel bedrooms at night. He even wrote them, and Madame Supplice often said, in her extra-lucid voice: "If ever His Highness leaves little Louise, she will take his letters to the frontier. I am surprised that a Highness should write such things. She will take them. She's got him."

Altogether, Louise enjoyed perfect liberty except at the moment of great political disturbances.

On the fifteenth of each month an officer

with blue moustaches turned into the rue Montchanin, clicked his heels, and presented an envelope.

Mahieddine admired his uniform through the transom of the bathroom door.

One morning toward six o'clock, while Mahieddine was dressing to meet Jacques, the idea of a joke came to him. Louise was asleep. On the night table stood a box filled with rings and coins. His joke, more or less funny, consisted in dropping one coin on another noisily and awaking the sleeping girl by pretending in this fashion that they were in a one-night hotel.

Sleep possesses its universe, its geography, its geometry, its calendar. Occasionally, it takes us back to a time before the Flood. Then we recover a mysterious science of the sea. We swim, and we feel ourselves flying without effort.

Louise's memories did not go back so far. The sound of the coin drew her up from a shallower stratum of dream.

"Gustave," she sighed; "leave me something for lunch."

She sighed ten years into the past.

Mahieddine marvelled at this episode. He laughed to himself in the street. Jacques was waiting for him. He told him what a coin dropped into a swamp will bring up.

“Poor girl,” said Jacques; “don’t mention it to her.”

“You dramatize everything,” exclaimed Mahieddine. “You shouldn’t. You poison your own life.”

In the underground, Jacques noticed that he had forgotten his wrist-watch. He did not see Germaine the next day. On the day after, he went to the rue Daubigny at ten o’clock to get it.

Madame Supplice was not in her quarters. He put in his key, turned it, crossed the entry, opened the door. What did he see? Germaine and Louise.

They slept enlaced like initials, and so curiously that the arms and legs of one seemed to belong to the other. Imagine the queen of hearts undressed.

Confronted by these white bodies in disorder

on the sheet, Jacques became as speechless as Perrette before her spilled milk. Should he kill them? That would be ridiculous, and, moreover, a pleonasm. It seemed impossible to make these dead any more dead, except that Germaine's open mouth was moving and Louise's legs twitched like those of a sleeping dog.

A striking thing was the naturalness of this spectacle. One would have said that this frank display embellished these beautiful girls. Brought up in vice, they found relaxation in it.

Whence had these two drowned women risen? Doubtless they came from afar. All the waves and all the moons had rolled them from Lesbos to expose them here under a froth of lace and muslin.

Jacques felt so out of place that he thought of going without a sign. But as Jesus resuscitates a sinner his presence resuscitated Louise.

“Is that you, Ma?” she called, her eyes half-open.

She opened them, recognized Jacques, and shook Germaine.

The situation demanded indifference or brutality. Jacques murmured:

“You are a nice pair.”

“What do you mean, a nice pair!” cried Germaine. “Had you rather I deceived you with a man?”

A woman of this class who is still in love will lie. But, without realizing it, she was no longer in love. Since that Sunday at the farm the fire had gone out, and her heart loved now only from habit.

“You are young,” Louise added with a yawn.

Jacques took the wrist-watch and left immediately. He was back at the Berlins’ before the feeling came over him that he had been a fool. After this personal reflex, he came back to Germaine’s point of view. He related his discovery to Mahieddine who was already aware of the commerce between the two friends.

“Don’t get excited,” said Mahieddine. “Moral laws are the rules of a game at which everybody cheats and has cheated since the beginning of the world. Nobody can change

that. Go to meet them at the rink at four o'clock. I have a class. I'll come and get you at six."

Jacques shaved, contemplated the myopic photograph, congratulated himself on having such rivals as Osiris and Louise, tossed off a translation from the Greek, and hurried away to the rink. A gala had been organized for the benefit of a musicians' charity fund.

## VIII

THE skating rink was jammed. The Vesuvian rumble of the skates on the concrete filled the ears, even during the intermissions. A negro orchestra alternated with a mechanical organ. The negroes threw trombone notes to one another like so many pieces of raw meat. Near the organ, which was vomiting sound behind a cardboard stairway, a woman in mourning was writing letters at a little table. She changed the rolls. A sad crowd rolled about, each believing himself surrounded by empty space. A charming slate shooting-gallery hung with pipes, red targets, lines of rabbits, palm trees, and zouaves, was set up in the basement. The water-spout on which an egg danced was a tulip tree from which the marksman cut the tulip. The woman attendant bent over and reflowered the tree. Men in sweaters were bowling. From

above, this bowling alley, between the two musics, made a dull sound, like boot-trees thrown into the four corners of a bedroom.

Above the railing of a balcony which dominated the hall, their ribbons fluttering in the wind of the electric fans, two American sailors bent over the gulf with the profiles of Dante and Virgil.

Banners and spotlights decorated the rink.

One number consisted in a revival of the cancan. Eight women, survivors of the golden age, shook a veritable barnyard in time to Offenbach's rhythms. Occasionally, one could distinguish only their black legs in a white foam reminiscent of the Palais Royal Théâtre bedding; sometimes they made their feet pop into the air like champagne corks, and the foam underneath inundated them. The birth of Venus did not raise more foam.

This dance moves the Parisian as greatly as bull-fights move the Spaniard. The dancers end on the split, forming a group like one of those transparent cards in which, straining her bust of wax, the old Eiffel Tower Kid smiles, cleft in two to the heart.

Despite the jostling mob, Jacques found the young women seated. Their Hindu idol image with many limbs pursued him. He had to make an effort to separate them.

"Here," said Germaine; "this is too cold. Take my glass."

Jacques was drinking, happy to put into his mouth a straw through which Germaine had drunk, when a shock stove in the railing about the rink against the table at which they sat. Two red hands seized the padded plush rail. Jacques looked up. It was Stopwell.

"Hello Jacques. I'm sorry. I was skating. I recognized you. I came down like thunder. I didn't know you came to this rink."

"But," shrieked Jacques, for the organ made speech impossible; "if you come often, why haven't I seen you here before?"

"I used to skate elsewhere. I came here because of the charity affair."

He disappeared across the floor.

"Who is that?" Germaine asked.

"It is the Englishman, the terrible Englishman in *Around the World*."

"Ask him over," said Louise; "he's alone.

You didn't even ask him to sit down at our table."

It is in this way that clouds gather, that the air grows chill, that plants droop, that a pearly surface colors the water.

Jacques went after Stopwell and Stopwell came to sit between Germaine and Louise. As Verlaine said of Lucien Letinois: *He skated marvellously.* He wore knickerbockers, charming English trousers which buckle below the knee and fall over the leg, Scotch stockings, a soft shirt, and a tie striped in the colors of his club. His grace and his ease struck Jacques. He was used to seeing him only at the Berlins' and, like a canvas whose quality is not appreciated until it is framed and hung in a bright light, Stopwell emerged at the rink with new values.

Germaine spoke of masculine elegance. Jacques, irritated, claimed that all Englishmen had a disciplined elegance, and that French elegance was superior because of its very rarity. He cited the distinction of certain members of the Jockey Club whose charming

singularity belonged only to them. He tried to make them appreciate the silhouette of the late Duc de Montmorency, frayed, spotted, bringing his opera hat to table.

He missed his goal. Approaching misfortune deprives a man of all his weapons.

Stopwell agrees with him. Stopwell speaks. He accentuates the faults of his French. He speaks now for the first time. He never deigns to speak of the Berlins! He speaks of England. It is like a sailor speaking of his ship. Jacques is fair; he finds him noble. From his seat on the extreme right, he bows. He lowers his head.

Now Stopwell crushes him with an indirect retort. He speaks of elegance. He chops his sentences with "you know's" which are graceful, terrible, like his handshake.

"There is real elegance in London, you know," he says. "Opposite Rumpelmayer's, for example" (he addresses the women), "the little shop of Lock, the hatter. It is very dark and very small; so small that the clerks nail the cases in the street. All the coal of England" (and Stopwell speaks with the voice of Lady

Macbeth when she pronounces the famous phrase: *All the perfumes of Arabia . . .*)—“all the coal of England has gone to the making of this little diamond. Behind the vitrine, as you say, you may see old, old hats, hats a century old, white with dust. Mr. Lock never brushes them. And when Lord Ribblesdale tries on his hat . . . then, you know . . . it is *mag-ni-fique*.<sup>2</sup>”

He scans this *magnifique* and stresses the *mag* and the *fique* while burying his hands in the pockets of his knickers, stuffed with nickel chains and keys.

The women are silent.

Germaine drinks in his words. Her eyes capsize. Jacques is lost, for, incorporated in this woman who is detaching herself from him without transition, he sees himself diminish in proportion as she recedes from him. Like the cobbler in *The Arabian Nights*, he takes on again his original form. He becomes again what he was before their love. This physical and mental torture is more than he can endure.

“What’s the matter with you, my little

Jacques?" asked Louise. "Your lip is trembling."

But Germaine can hear neither question nor answer.

"Up!" Stopwell commands, rising on his skates; "come and skate with me."

Germaine leaves the table and follows him like a slave.

Jacques looks at the rink. It stretches and curves in the distorting mirrors. The music changes too. Its sounds arrive alternately loud and soft, as if he were amusing himself by covering and uncovering his ears. He sees Peter and Germaine like two of El Greco's monks. They stretch, they turn green, they mount to heaven, swooning and struck by the lightning of the mercury lights. Then they roll away, very far away: Germaine broad and dwarfed, Stopwell become a Louis-Philippe armchair, launching its feet to right and left. The bar pitches. Louise moves forward a blurred face, like a close-up in an art film. She moves her lips, and Jacques hears no sound.

He is no longer richly enclosed in Ger-

maine's personality. He feels his bones, his ribs, his yellow hair, his pointed teeth, his freckles, everything he detests and had so lately ceased to feel.

Under the spotlights of the waltz that strangles him, Germaine and Stopwell pass from one end of the rink to the other on one leg, hands joined, in the pose of a Roman charioteer. Stopwell swells his chest. He thinks he is Achilles. For one second, Jacques finds him ridiculous and thinks naïvely that Germaine is about to see it, to fly from him, to come back alone, to admit that it was a jest.

Louise is not mean, but she is a woman. She remembers. She contemplates the victim with satisfaction.

Mahieddine arrives. Louise winks, lowers the corners of her mouth, and indicates the pair of waltzers with a movement of her chin.

Mahieddine replies to the explanatory grimaces by another which consists in advancing the lower lip and bending the head while opening enormous eyes.

Jacques is decapitated. His head rolls on his breast.

"Take him home," says Louise to her lover.  
"He is going to faint."

Jacques refuses to go. He is not of those who leave. He belongs to the accursed race that remain, that drain the last drop.

The waltz ends. Germaine and Stopwell return, clinging to chairs and people. Germaine falls against a fat woman and laughs. The woman insults her. Stopwell shrugs his shoulders. The woman's husband rises. The woman calms him and forces him to sit down.

Jacques guesses at what is going on. All this is not very clear to him.

As if she were warning a chattering friend at a funeral that a member of the family is standing near, Louise, with the same movement of her chin, calls Germaine's attention to the unhappy boy.

"He'll get over it," says Germaine.

This response is humane in the sense in which the law esteems it humane for an officer to shoot at close range a wounded man who is still breathing.

"A cigarette?" Stopwell offers.

The delightful courtesy of the executioner.

Retreat sounded and they left. They got into Germaine's car. Jacques, hoisted, tossed, his strength gone, saw to right and left a confused scene. A profile: Mahieddine; the Odéon Théâtre, the Luxembourg Gardens, the Gambrinus Café, the Médicis Fountain. They were taking Stopwell home.

The motor stopped near the Panthéon. Stopwell got out. As Jacques remained in his seat:

"Wake up!" said Germaine. "Are you asleep? You're home."

He stammered, jumped out, and accompanied Stopwell in silence. Mahieddine went on with Louise.

Peter went to his room and Jacques to his. There, sinking to his knees beside the bed, he evacuated the tears which were holding a microscope between his lids and were showing him a grotesque universe.

Jacques could not understand how he was going to live, go to bed, get up, wash, go on,

with this incredible suffering which seemed to him too great to be borne a single hour.

He asked to be excused, did not go down to dinner, and went to bed. He hoped for the truce of sleep.

Sleep is not at our command. It is a blind fish which rises from the deep, a bird that swoops down upon us.

He felt the fish swimming in a circle, out of reach. The bird folded its wings, came down on the border of insomnia, arched its neck, preened its feathers, marked time with its feet, but did not come in.

Jacques held his bird-catcher's breath. Finally, the bird rose, flew off, and Jacques remained face to face with the Impossible.

Impossible. It was impossible. Because of the momentum gathered by Germaine's heart, Jacques could distinguish no transition.

In one second, he has seen a face recede for miles. The hand which only yesterday had reached for his own was today unresponsive.

His glance had encountered, instead of a warm, coaxing eye, the cold eye that inspects.

He repeated to himself: it is impossible. I am dreaming. Stopwell despises women, and feigns the rest as an Oxford pose. He is chaste. He makes a face when you speak of physical love. "It isn't done," he says, and he adds: "How can one sleep with others?" Even if Germaine feels a capricious interest, she will encounter only space. Stopwell is suspicious of France. On the other side of the Channel his father the curate, his football team, and his regiment are looking at him. The danger signal will have no sequel.

Suddenly a weight invests his eyes. His jaws stiffen. The bird is in the trap, the fish in the bowl. He sleeps.

He dreams. He dreams that he is not dreaming and that Stopwell, wearing a Scotch kilt, is forcing him to believe that he is dreaming. Then, he is skating; he is flying. He flies about the rink in which trees are growing. Stopwell is trying to humiliate him; tells Germaine that he is dreaming, that he is not really flying. Germaine is skipping beside Stopwell

with the aid of a parasol. The parasol becomes their parachute. Stopwell's kilt grows very long, with a train.

Germaine, accompanied by a church organ, sings the *Honorat Silencieux*. This title without meaning acquires one in the dream.

Jacques falls. He sinks into the bottom of a linen basket. He is awakened. He hears Mahieddine going to bed. It must be morning. He goes back to sleep. He is at the rink again. The skating floor is revolving. That is why Stopwell seems to be skating. He points out the trick to Germaine. She laughs; kisses him. He is happy.

Petitcopain shakes him for class. He gets up; dashes cold water on his face.

One by one, like soldiers at roll-call, his sleeping memories awake and line up in platoon formation. The memory of the rink in its turn. But scarcely has it appeared when the others shrink. It alone grows greater, swells, becomes colossal.

Men who have been stuck with a knife can live without realizing their wound so long as

the knife remains in it. Once you pull out the knife, the blood runs and the flesh goes to work.

The cold water drew out the knife from Jacques' wound.

He decided, although Germaine was asleep at this hour, to run to her and be kissed, scolded, have his wound healed.

When we awake, it is the animal, the plant, that thinks in us. Primitive thought without the least disguise. We see a terrible universe, because we see clearly. A little later, intelligence introduces its impeding contrivances. It brings the little toys which man invents in order to hide the void. It is then that we think we are seeing clearly. We attribute our uneasiness to the miasmas of the brain as it passes from dream to reality.

Jacques reassured himself. Class was at nine o'clock. He shook hands with Peter. At ten, he jumped into a taxi, bought flowers on the way, and drove to Germaine's.

Josephine opened the door with astonishment. Germaine was asleep.

"I'll wake her up," he said.

Jacques went in. Transported into the past by her dream, Germaine displayed the face he loved. He studied it, rejoicing. He laid the fresh flowers against her cheek.

She was of those alert people who waken instantly.

"It's you, is it?" said she. "Are you crazy, to be disturbing people at this hour of the morning?"

"I couldn't stand it any longer," he replied. "I dreamed that you had thrown me over. I jumped into a cab."

Germaine did not hesitate to break a heart. She shared with servants the notion that a precious thing broken can be glued together again.

"You were not dreaming, my little man. Keep your flowers. I am frank. I love Peter and he loves me. You'll find a dozen girls like me. Let me sleep."

She turned toward the wall. Jacques lay on the floor and sobbed.

"Look here," Germaine protested; "this room isn't a hospital. I hate men who cry. Go back to the rue de l'Estrapade and work. You're not living the way a boy ought who is getting ready for his examinations."

Jacques begged. She wore the gas-mask, the paraffin, of people whose love has died. She measured Jacques' love by her own loves. She thought the crisis would pass in a day. She rang.

"Josephine, bring Monsieur Jacques a little brandy."

She was like a dentist who knows that an extraction makes one faint, and provokes a shock which will soon disappear.

Jacques drank to please her. Josephine helped him up, gave him his hat and his stick, and pushed him out like the dentist's nurse. The nurse knows the after-effects of an operation but has to usher in another patient who is impatient.

From that moment, Jacques' life was fogged

like a photographic plate when the camera is half opened to the light.

"Be gentle with him," Madame Berlin repeated to the professor. "He is suffering."

"What from?"

"No matter. Women divine certain things.  
. . ."

For she was still at her romance.

Mahieddine continued to see Louise. His comings and goings tore Jacques into pieces. His propinquity was scarcely consoling.

To wait is the most minute of occupations. The brain, like a hive on swarming day, is emptied, and retains only the elements of a joyless work. If our frivolous senses disturb it, the bees of sorrow paralyze them. We must wait, wait, wait; eat mechanically to give strength to the factory of false sounds, false calculations, false memories and false hopes.

What was Jacques doing? He was waiting.

What was he waiting for? A miracle. A sign from Germaine. A wire.

Lying on his bed, his heart knotted like those sailors' knots which are loosened or

tightened by the movements of the rope, he watched the outer door, on the lookout for a telegraph messenger to appear. He invented sounds in the entry and on the stairway. The distinct sounds vanished in the passage. When he went out, he scarcely dared return. He would ask the concierge:

“Have they brought a wire for me?”

“No, M. Forestier,” she would answer.

Then he would think that the concierge could not have seen the messenger. He would count up to twelve on each step. His credulous mind imagined that while he was doing this the wire might come to birth spontaneously on his table.

One morning it came. *Come to Louise's at five o'clock*, wrote Germaine; *I have something to say to you.*

He kissed it, folded it, put it into his pocket with the myopic photograph, and thereafter was never without it.

What to do until five o'clock?

He fidgeted; he talked. He killed a little of the time which was killing him.

Stopwell avoided him, and they met only at

table. Mahieddine thought him cured. Madame Berlin, heroic. Her love affair with Jacques seemed to her like that of the Duc de Nemours and the Princess de Clèves.

At four o'clock, Jacques went to the rue Montchanin.

He found the two women there. Louise pretended to be polishing her nails. Germaine was walking back and forth. She wore her hair drawn back over the ears, a pair of earrings, a new face, a tailored suit of beige and black checks which Jacques had never seen.

"Sit down," she ordered. "You know that I am frank. I am not one of those women who pretend. Stopwell doesn't want—" she stressed this—"he doesn't want us to live together without your knowing it and agreeing to it. I must say that I don't know many friends who would act that way. We are going to dine tonight at Enghien. Is it yes or no?"

"Come, my little Jacques," said Louise with her buffer in the air; "come, a graceful gesture."

She felt not at all dissatisfied.

This *graceful gesture* exasperated Jacques. He found enough strength to reply:

"There are no graceful gestures, Louise. Only ministers of state and patronesses make graceful gestures. I give in. You cannot control a heart."

The man under the guillotine has a last hope, for if the knife does not work he will be pardoned. Jacques still hoped that his generosity of soul would touch Germaine and bring her back to him.

"Shake hands," said she.

He recognized the English handshake.

"A little tea?" Louise asked.

"No, Louise . . . no. I'm going."

He shut his eyes. Under his eyelids, Germaine's suit became by dint of staring a red checkerboard which glided to the right, reappeared on the left, and glided again.

In the rue de l'Estrapade, Jacques knocked on Stopwell's door.

"Stopwell," he said; "she has told me everything. She is free."

Did Peter believe that she had told him everything, or was he profiting by this occasion to deliver the lance stroke?

"We are gentlemen. You should know that I had no idea there was a woman in Maricelles' room. I heard some one move about. I thought I would catch Petitcopain."

After these incomprehensible words, Jacques found himself again in the passage, feeling as if he were "it" in Blindman's Buff, and the players had been dizzying him.

Mahieddine was going out. Jacques stopped him, and grilled him with questions. He learned that on the evening when Germaine came to the rue de l'Estrapade, during the rite of the clock-winding, Stopwell, informed by Petitcopain, went into Maricelles' room and excused himself. Germaine detained him, told him that she was waiting for Jacques, questioned him about the pupils, the work, schools in England. Stopwell told her he thought French schools were wanting in sport and asked if she liked sports. She said no; all she did was to roller-skate. She told him where they skated.

"I must go now," Stopwell had said, "for I am afraid Forestier will come up. He is sensitive, you know. He might think I had come in purposely. Promise me not to tell him that I opened this door."

Jacques remembered his fooling about the Englishman in *Around the World*.

He reached his room. On the purest of his memories he had just found a spot.

And this is where we meet him at the beginning of our book. His body stiffens. He resists. He has become Jacques once more, and looks at himself in the mirror.

A mirror is not the pool of Narcissus; you cannot plunge into it. Jacques laid his forehead against it, and his breath hid the pale face that he detested.

Dark glasses and melancholy extinguish the colors of the world, but through them we can look straight at the sun and at death.

Therefore he looked forward to suicide without a grimace, as to a *de luxe voyage*. These

voyages seem unreal. We force ourselves to prepare for them.

Jacques was afraid of an ignoble end. He saw again the journalist at Venice, green and swollen. He remembered the body of a suicide near the racetrack at Maisons-Lafitte, on the edge of the Seine, the temples like jelly, the feet like those of a dancer because of the moving water in which they floated half-hidden.

On the day before, he had overheard a doctor who lived on the fifth floor deplore the number of deaths from narcotics. He was telling the story of one of his patients who had telephoned him one night, almost frantic. Her lover, whom she had thought asleep, was dead. He had sniffed too much powder.

The doctor answered the call, dressed the corpse, and carried it arm in arm down to a cab and as far as an obliging clinic in order to save the woman's reputation and stifle the scandal which would have arisen about the names of well known business men.

Jacques made up his mind.

At about eleven o'clock in the morning he

went to the skating-rink. The deserted hall was being aired. The barman was sweeping out his bar. Jacques greeted him and, blushing violently, commenced:

“You know that I never take drugs.”

“Oh yes, Monsieur Jacques,” said the barman who knew the ways of beginners.

“Have you any? I want some for a Russian woman.”

The barman went behind his bar, stretched his neck to see if they were alone, took down the jeroboam which adorned his sideboard, lifted out the false bottom, and asked:

“How much of it do you want? Four grams? Twelve grams?”

“Give me ten grams.”

The barman counted out ten little envelopes at twenty francs each, pocketed the two bills, and advised the greatest prudence.

“Don’t worry about me,” said Jacques. He put the envelopes into his pocket, shook hands with the barman, and left the rink.

A cross-cut took him over the floor. This floor was his place of execution. It strengthened his resolution.

He came back peacefully like a man who, having taken his sleeping-car ticket, is no longer obliged to worry about the annoying details of a voyage.



## IX

DESPITE class distinctions, life carries us all off together at high speed in the train headed toward death. The wisest thing would be to sleep until we run into the station at the terminus. But alas the trip enchant us, and we take so disproportionate an interest in what should be merely our pastime that it is hard, on the last day, to have to close our valises.

Let but the car aisle which unites the classes draw two souls secretly together and mingle them, and the realization that the end of the trip or the descent of one or the other en route will shatter the idyl, renders the perspective of the end intolerable. We should like long stops in the middle of the fields. We look out of the car window which is, because of the telegraph wires, an awkward harpist,

practising an arpeggio and eternally recommencing it. We try to read; we near the end. We envy those who at the moment of death are able like Socrates to think of a barber for Phædo and a rooster for Æsculapius, putting their affairs in order without fright.

Jacques, too much alone, threw himself from the moving train. Or perhaps the diver stifling in the human body is trying to rid himself of it. He reaches for the emergency signal.

Jacques took off his clothes, wrote a few lines on a pad which he left in view, and unfolded his packets of powder. He emptied them by their corners into an old cigarette box. The contents scintillated like mica.

He had in his room a bottle of whisky, a siphon, and a glass—a habit acquired from Stopwell. He poured out some whisky, mixed the powder into it, and drank it off, all in a single movement. Then he lay down.

The invasion took place from all sides at once. His face hardened. He remembered a similar sensation at the dentist's. He touched

unfamiliar teeth, enshrined in wood, with a pasty tongue. A cold wave as of ether vaporized his cheeks and eyes. Waves of goose-flesh ran over his limbs and stopped about his heart which beat as if it would break. These waves, coming, going, from his toes to the roots of his hair, imitated the skimpy sea which is always being taken from one beach to be given to another. A mortal cold replaced the waves. It played, blossomed, disappeared and reappeared like the designs in watered silk.

Jacques felt a weight of cork, a weight of marble, a weight of snow. It was the angel of death accomplishing his work. He lies flat on his stomach upon those who are about to die, and spies upon their slightest distraction in order to turn them into statues.

Death sends him. He is like one of those extraordinary envoys who marry in the place of their prince. They do so therefore with indifference.

A masseur is eventually unmoved by the skin of young women. The angel works coldly, cruelly, patiently, until the spasm occurs. Then he flies off.

His victim divines him to be as implacable as the surgeon who gives chloroform, or the boa which, to eat a gazelle, dilates itself little by little like a woman in labor.

“The snow man . . . the snow man. . . .” A hazy ditty charmed his ears. We speak to children of the sandman when they want to stay up with their elders and lose themselves in artless slumber. The chin touching their breast awakes them, brings them up astonished to the surface.

Jacques heard a voice which chanted: “The snow man . . . snow . . . snow. . . .” He must not let himself be taken in, and Jacques floated, his head well back, only his deaf ears plunged in the unknown element. For the work of the angel was terrible in this, that being illimitable, it took place above, below, and inside. The angel was not brutal; he rested, and then resumed his work with redoubled force.

Between the decision to drown, the act, and the surprises which it reserves to the organism, what distances! The water has scarcely entered the nostrils when many weaklings swim,

or, not knowing how to swim, despairingly invent swimming.

Fear took hold of Jacques. He wanted to pray, to join his hands. They were heavy, immovable.

A dead arm on which one has slept changes quickly into seltzer water; it sparkles and can obey. Jacques' hands remained inert.

The movements we execute in an airplane cannot be known to us. The machine remains motionless. Enveloped in helmet and goggles, we see houses which grow tiny and then swell, a dead city divided by its river. This city swings, or becomes a map against a wall. Suddenly we loop, and the city is painted over our heads. This game of the world around the pilot is accompanied by anguish. The stomach faints. The ears are stopped. Vertigo cuts through the breast like a thread cutting through butter. Sometimes we ground still thinking ourselves a mile in the air; a briar patch becomes a forest.

Jacques, lying in his bed, commenced to confound his symptoms with external phenom-

ena. The partitions of his room breathed. The sound of the clock came now from the ink well, now from the wardrobe. The window was closed; or opened on a starry sky. The bed slid, leaned, balanced in unstable equilibrium. It fell back, and leaned slowly over again.

Jacques' brain became more lucid, despite a hive-like murmur. He saw Tours, his poor mother opening a telegram, growing petrified, his father closing a valise.

“This is the end,” he thought. “Death shows us our entire existence.” But he saw nothing else. His mother’s face changed. It was Germaine. It was Germaine or his mother. Then Germaine alone, whom he could remember only with painful difficulty. He confused her eyes and mouth with the eyes and mouth of an English girl, one of the beasts of his desire, seen for a moment at the Casino at Lucerne. The whole was swallowed up by an edelweiss. He was looking through a reading-glass at this little sea-star in white velvet which grows in the Alps. He was nine years old. They missed the train to Geneva because

he was stamping his feet, demanding that one be bought for him.

“Memories,” he said to himself; “now come the memories.”

But he was mistaken. The edelweiss ended the seance.

Nocturnal beasts hide during the day; a fire drives them from their lairs. The end of a bull fightmingles the spectators who have been sitting in the sun with those who have been sitting in the shade. The tumult of the drug mingled in Jacques his shadow-half with his light-half. He felt vaguely a disgust and a sense of disaster foreign to the physical drama. He remembered neither his wasted heart nor his weeks of debauch. He vomited them as a drunkard vomits the wine he cannot remember to have drunk.

Jacques rises. He loses his boundaries. He is unconscious of the system which he is overthrowing, but he feels a responsibility. The night of the human body possesses its nebulæ, its suns, its worlds, its moons. A mind less the

slave of benumbed matter divines how simple is the mechanism of the universe. It is as simple as a wheel. If it were not, it would get out of order. Our death destroys universes, and the universes of our sky are inside a person of disconcerting dimensions. Does God contain all? Jacques falls back.

Speculations of this breadth are frequent with poisoned people. They lend illusion to many mediocre people about their intelligence. These people imagine themselves to be solving eternal problems.

After a lull, the watery lines, the shudders, the cramps, began again. Jacques felt within him less and less strength for the struggle. Fountains of sweat spurted up through his skin. His heart beat faintly. He felt its beating even less because it had just beaten too loudly. His shoulders were flat under the angel. He was sinking. The water rose higher than his ears. This phase was interminable.

Jacques no longer resisted.

“There, there, there,” the angel said. “You see we are getting there; it is not so painful. . . .”

Jacques answered: "Yes, it is very easy, very easy" . . . and waited without revolt.

Finally, like a torpedoed sailing-ship grown as heavy as a building, saluting and going down obliquely into the sea, Jacques sank.

He is not dead.

The angel carries out nobody knows what counter-order.

Petitcopain came back from the Internes' Ball (his first ball) at five o'clock in the morning. He saw a light under Jacques' door, and, partly to get some matches, partly to prove his exploit, he went in. He saw this false corpse, the pad on which Jacques had scribbled, and awoke Mahieddine, Stopwell, the Berlins, and the fifth-floor doctor.

Hot water bottles and plasters were prepared. Jacques was massaged. They poured black coffee between his lips. They opened the window. Madame Berlin, who believed herself to be the cause of the suicide, wept hot

tears. Berlin draped a blanket over his shoulders.

A rescue party was organized. A nurse was found. At eight o'clock the doctor announced that Jacques was saved.

To what did he owe his life? To a swindler. Once again, though unintentionally, his shadow-half had saved him. The barman had sold him a fairly harmless mixture.

## X

**C**ONVALESCENCE was long, for the poison in the blood had given him jaundice. After the jaundice there appeared symptoms of neuritis in the left leg which gradually disappeared. He was grateful for these sharp pains which medical science calls "exquisite," admiring them as though they were the illuminations of a precious missal. Only such pains can dissipate an obsession.

Despite the discreet disappearance of the champion broad-jumper, the rue de l'Estrapade increased his exhaustion. Finally, when it became possible to move him, his mother, who had been living in a hotel and nursing him for the past month, aided by Petitcopain, carried him off to Touraine.

It was there that Jacques, now free of poi-

son and of remedies, awoke one February afternoon.

The wall paper of his room represented an ancient stag hunt. The burning logs were intense, furred and striped, feline at a distance and terrible when one approached, like the face of a tiger. His mother sat knitting near his chaise-longue.

Jacques prolongs his stupor. He pretends to be still asleep. He forbids the memories of his childhood to interfere with his new memories. He is moving chessmen interminably, awkwardly: Germaine, Stopwell, Osiris, Jacques Forestier. He corrects his faulty moves, combines new and impossible ones.

This game exhausts him and wearies his slight, convalescent strength. After a few seconds, the chessboard becomes a maze: Osiris, Germaine, and Stopwell surround him. He is beaten, still beaten.

Jacques wonders if there has not been a misdeal, if Germaine is not a counterfeit, and if his desire was not tricked by a resemblance. But no. Desire never deceives. Germaine is really of the race.

For there is that race on earth: a race which never looks back, never suffers, never loves, never falls ill; a diamond race which cuts the race of glass.

Jacques adored this type from afar. This is the first time that he has rubbed against it.

What can a Germaine and a Stopwell do to each other? But Stopwell can cut Petitcopain to the soul.

River race, too. Petitcopain and Jacques are of the race of the drowned. Jacques got out just in time. A little more, and he had remained. And after all, what good is it to fish him out? Let but one of these rivers flow, one of these stones gleam, and he will run to it inevitably.

Well, he will not. He will struggle. Our will changes the lines in our hands. By building dykes, we turn away fate. Ulysses tied himself up; he will do the same. In a theatre lobby, he will fly from the sirens. It is easy to recognize them. If we decide never more to lend a credulous ear we soon discover the vulgarity of their musical repertory.

What is a diamond? A coal dealer's son

grown rich. Let us not sacrifice our luck to him. Neither river nor diamond. Soft and hard water shall no longer have his tears.

Thus Jacques convinces himself. He thinks he is changing his nature, surrounding the enemy, looking him in the face, trussing up the ghost, putting himself on guard against a known danger.

The words—river, diamond, glass, siren, are negro fetishes. A signal would be better. But what signal? The real monster has far too many disguises. Their multitude hides his true shape.

Jacques stirs, looks at his mother, and smiles. She rises. She is about to make a charming blunder, to avow her jealousy.

“Jacques,” she says, “my Jacques, you must not torment yourself for a wicked woman.”

Jacques foregoes his resolutions on the instant. He stiffens, revolts. Madame Forestier sits down again. He feels about on the table for a card case, opens it, draws out in bravado the photograph of Germaine. What does he see? A dancer. He shuts his eyes. His scheme reappears. He clings to it. His

mother forgives him and, to break the silence:

"Do you remember Idgi d'Ybréo at Mürren?"

She counts her stitches. . . .

"The paper says she died in Cairo."

This time Madame Forestier drops her work. Jacques falls backward. Tears run from his eyes, tears of grief.

"Jacques, my angel!" she cried. "What is it? Jacques!"

She kisses him, folds him in her shawl. He sobs without answering.

He sees a bed. Against this bed stands the god Anubis. He has the head of a dog. He licks a little face, all cold, all noble, already mummified by sorrow.



## EPILOGUE

**A**T the end of a month Jacques was healthier than before his illness, for the repose of an illness rests nervous people. He had to take up his studies again. It was decided that he would return to Paris with his mother, that they would live together, and that a tutor would live with them. Jacques had suggested this plan. He felt himself still too insecure to be able to live without support. He knew that he and his mother would doubtless bruise each other continuously, but a fixed point of love, of respect, would signal to him the moment he strayed out of his course. His own nature was not straight enough to warn him. It leaned and wavered without shock.

M. Forestier no longer needed a plumb line. He gave his wife to his son. He would come to see them in May.

On the morning of their return to Paris

Jacques realized, from his regret at not arriving alone, how much the presence of Madame Forestier was indispensable. He suffocated. He dared not mingle with the crowd. He went awkwardly into the sea. He found it cold and mad.

Madame Forestier had to air the apartment, make arrangements with the servants, and get rid of the antimacassar and the moth balls. Jacques was to meet her at seven o'clock and they were to dine in town.

The street excited his restored body. He said to himself, My eyes are open. I look at Paris as I looked at Venice. Only something dramatic could wake me.

Then he fell back inert beneath a chaos of buildings, motorbuses, signs, barricades, kiosks, whistles, and subterranean rumblings. He remembered the young men in Balzac who, on arriving in Paris, put their feet on the first rung of a golden ladder. He found not a single handle to his grasp. On light Paris he floated heavily. He was oil on water; a stray. He was disheartened.

He had to call on a prospective tutor whose

address in the rue Réaumur had been given him by his father. The tutor happened not to be at home. Jacques left a card.

As he was passing before the Exchange, a man came up from underground. He recognized Osiris. Osiris coming up out of the necropolis hollowed underneath a temple was the god Osiris symbolizing the past. Jacques' heart pounded. He walked more quickly.

"Hey! Jacques! Jacques!"

Nestor was calling him. Impossible to escape.

"Where are you running to? Of all things! I never expected to see you. Germaine told me that your family were keeping you in the country. I said you were a deserter. I wondered what it was we could have done to you. You skipped out without a word."

Jacques mumbled that he had been very ill, that he had just got in from Touraine, and that he was spending one day in Paris.

"One day in Paris! I won't let you go. Come and have a glass of vermouth with me."

Osiris' office was a few steps away in the rue de Richelieu.

While Nestor opened the office, got rid of his coat, hunted the vermouth and the glasses in a cupboard, Jacques saw on a mantel shelf a recent photograph of Germaine. His eyes filled with tears.

"You look well but you're pale; drink," said Nestor. "Vermouth is good for pale people. Do you smoke? No? I don't smoke any more. I'm on a diet. Look at my stomach."

He sat down in a leather armchair and crossed his legs, holding one foot in his left hand and a glass in the other.

"Damned old Jack! Germaine repeated to me again and again that your family had forced you to cut right out, but I kept wondering if you weren't sulking. Can you ever tell about Germaine? She is such a tease. She will be very glad to learn that I have seen you. Do you know our latest craze, our latest favorite? No; it's true, you don't know anything. I'll give you a thousand guesses. . . . Mahieddine! Yes, my dear fellow, Mahieddine. We swear only by Mahieddine now. Mahieddine is a poet. Mahieddine is handsome. You see that she has not changed."

Jacques had not expected to hear the Arab's name. His surprise rejoiced Nestor. He slapped his foot and laughed.

"Fashions go out, I've seen them pass, I've seen them pass. Germaine smokes amber cigarettes, eats *loukoum*, burns incense. All that is disgusting to me. But I am an old imbecile. Mahieddine is always right. Observe that if I were to force my bazaar on her she wouldn't have it for anything in the world. That's the woman of it. That's Germaine. I let her alone. Nothing can ever change her."

"And Louise?"

"Louise? Germaine doesn't see Louise any more. That's something else again. Just think; Mahieddine and Louise were not living together. It was platonic love. Then Germaine snatched Mahieddine away, and so on. We kidnapped her poet. As a matter of fact, I'm not sorry that she doesn't frequent Louise still. That's still another yarn. But can you believe that before Mahieddine everything was English? We were athletic, we played golf, we rode horseback, we ate porridge, we read the *Times*. You would have died laughing.

And as England was the thing, we had to have an Englishman. We have had an Englishman; very agreeable he was. You know him: Stopwell. Stopwell, the great favorite right after you left. Jacques skips out, and we must have something new. Do you get it? Bang! England lasts thirty-seven days. One week after the English crisis, she discovers your Stopwell. One month after the discovery, I receive anonymous letters. Germaine is deceiving you—you know the style—she had a bachelor apartment in the rue Daubigny. Good enough. I'm willing. I bite. Coming back from a hunting trip, I go to the rue Daubigny. I ring. The door opens. Who do you think I catch? Stopwell. Stopwell and Louise. Absolutely. Poor Stopwell was as red as a tomato. Louise laughed herself sick. The apartment is hers. It's where she hides from the Highness who lives incog. in Paris. You see how evil tongues get their information. On my way home, I hesitated. Ought I to tell Germaine? With her it's heads or tails. She took the thing tragically. She thought Stopwell was a virgin. She wept.

She had lost her mascot, her toy, her *dada*, her England. I did all I could to defend Stop: told her the flesh was weak, that Louise. . . . ‘No use. He’s a cad. Men are vile.’ And so on, and so on. She wouldn’t let Stop come into the place again. She shouted that the house was not a dance resort, that she would go out and live alone on the farm. I swear I’ve had a time of it.”

Jacques listened, rather uneasy. Quintus Curtius records that Alexander, in contact with the Barbarians, took on little by little all their defects. But Jacques, if he had learned to do three-shell tricks in contact with Germaine, had lost the gift. He was no longer the Jacques of *Around the World*. He could no longer admit so much blindness. He was like the detective who, divining the thief under the moustache of the banker, feels for the butt of his revolver. He wondered if Osiris were not jollying him, if he did not know, if he were not preparing something drastic.

Nestor went on:

“What do you expect, my poor friend? She

is a devil, a real devil. I love her, and so long as she doesn't deceive me, that is all I ask."

Jacques spilled some vermouth over the armchair.

"Don't bother, don't bother," said Osiris; "it doesn't matter."

"She has to be amused. I can't amuse her. I house her, dress her, look after her, but I have my bank. My head is filled with dates of payment. If I were a Stopwell, a Mahieddine, I should still be guarding asses in Egypt."

He got up. He drummed on the windows.

These words magnified this man so in Jacques eyes that he leaned back to survey him. He wondered if he were not seeing only the foundation. It seemed to him that an Osiris of granite, seated on five storeys of dead, was smiling from an incalculable height in a sky constellated with numerals.

Osiris broke the silence.

"There we are," he said; "there's where we are. There's the story, the latest returns. I have to go out. Coming with me? Where are you going? I'll drop you in my car."

Nestor took his coat and his top hat. Jacques recognized the credulous Nestor. His horns were not the horns of the bull Apis.

In the outer office, a young messenger was stamping envelopes.

"What are you doing, Jules?" asked Osiris. "Are you putting fifty-centime stamps on city letters?"

"I didn't have any others in the office, M. Osiris, and I thought. . . ."

"You didn't think right; you're discharged."

Osiris' face was inflexible. The messenger was white.

"Not another word!" cried Osiris. "Go to the cashier. You're discharged!"

He slammed the door.

In the stairway, Jacques saw again the helpless face of the discharged boy. Under the arch, his mind was made up. On the sidewalk:

"M. Osiris," he said; "I'm very sorry. I have to do an errand in the rue Réaumur. But please do me one favor. This boy Jules. He only wasted a franc. You are unjust. Why do you send him away?"

"Why?" Osiris hesitated. "Because THAT,

my dear Jacques, THAT, is something I can avoid."

Then, his face changing, he said good-bye affectionately. The automobile disappeared.

Alone on the Place de la Bourse, Jacques still heard Osiris' capitalized THAT; he saw the Oriental pulling the lapel of his overcoat while he pronounced the word, as one might pull an ear. The sentence seemed to him vague, high, mysterious. He saw in it the smile of the colossi.

Doubtless it held only a financier's meaning, was no more than an example of the powerful method of the Osirises, capable of bearing the heaviest losses without flinching, provided that such losses were inevitable. But Jacques' mind ran, piled up confusion.

He decided that, cost what it might, upon this phrase he would build his character, shoe himself in lead, put on a uniform.

I float internally, he thought, and **THAT I can avoid.** The rest is on the knees of the gods.

As he turned for the fourth time about the Exchange, he saw behind the iron gates

Osiris' former employee. Jules seemed prodigiously gay. He was playing with the bicycle messengers of the Havas Agency.

"A queer country," Jacques murmured.

These were the own words of an angel visiting the earth and hiding his wings under a glazer's hood.

He added:

"Under what uniform shall I hide my too tender heart? It will always show."

Jacques felt himself grow sombre again. He knew very well that in order to live in this world we must follow the fashion of the day, and hearts were no longer being worn.

THE END

















